THE WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING

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ROBERT BROWNING'S WORKS

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IN TEN VOLUMES

VOLUME VIII

THE WORKS OF

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY SIR F. G. KENYON, K.C.B., D.LITT.

VOLUME VIII — ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY — THE INN ALBUM — THE AGAMEMNON OF AESCHYLUS

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INTRODUCTION

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

DURING his summer holiday of 1872, while he was still collecting and meditating on the material for *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*, Browning was reading Aeschylus. In the early summer of 1873, when the Norman tragedy was off his hands, he was translating the *Hercules Furens* of Euripides; and during the holiday of 1874, which he and Miss Browning spent at Mers, near Tréport, in company with Miss Egerton Smith, he was engaged in incorporating this translation in that "last adventure of Balaustion," to which he gave the name of *Aristophanes' Apology*. During the two months that were spent at Mers, he was working at it strenuously, with the renewed energy which the change from the London season to the little seaside places of France always gave him; and early in 1875 this, his longest poem with the exception of *Sordello* and *The Ring and the Book*, was published.

The scheme of the poem connects it with *Balaustion's Adventure*, and, like it, it contains a translation of one of the dramas of Euripides; but whereas in the earlier work the main object

was the translation, with which the comparatively slight setting was inextricably interwoven, in *Aristophanes' Apology* the main interest is in the setting, and the translation might be detached, or "taken as read," without affecting the main theme. The real subject is the discussion of the merits of Euripides, which is supposed to take place between Balaustion and Aristophanes on the evening of the day when the latter had won the prize for comedy with his *Thesmophoriazusae*, and when the news had come of the death of Euripides in far-away Thrace. This discussion is complete in itself; the translation of the *Hercules* is only introduced by way of illustration of Balaustion's triumphant advocacy of her beloved poet. It is a fine translation of a fine—though by no means perfect—play; but its interest is eclipsed by Browning's own poem.

For the general public, *Aristophanes' Apology* labours under the difficulty that it abounds with allusions which require a considerable knowledge of Greek literature and history. Browning did not underrate the amount of information demanded of the reader when he told Dr. Furnivall (Wise, *Letters of R. Browning*, 1st series, ii. 4) that "the allusions require a knowledge of the Scholia, besides acquaintance with the 'Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta,'—Athenaeus, Alciphron, and so forth, not forgotten." Browning was not a classical scholar in the technical or professional sense of the term, but he had read much and discursively, and he absorbed what he read so

thoroughly that, although he wrote at a distance from his books, the poem abounds in references which it needs no little learning to recognise and trace. Without a general acquaintance with Greek literature, the main points at issue, and the intensity of feeling aroused by them, cannot be appreciated; and without the special knowledge thus postulated many of the phrases and allusions are unintelligible. For Browning's fame and the reputation of the poem this is unfortunate; for *Aristophanes' Apology* deserves to rank very high in respect both of intellectual force and of sheer poetry. To the lovers of Greek literature it is a classical presentation of one of its everlasting problems, a problem which will never be solved nor lose its attractions so long as Greek poetry is read. It is a problem of conflicting tastes, of different ideals and aims, a clash, not of good with evil, but of good with good: and it is presented by Browning with extraordinary dramatic power, with wonderful sympathy towards both sides, and with great and varied beauty of expression. The poem abounds with beauties,—the wonderful description of the fall of Athens, with which it opens, the news of the death of Euripides, the apparition of Aristophanes, "tolerably drunk" after the celebration of his victory, the vision of the "old pale-swathed majesty" of Sophocles, the lay of Thamuris, the dignified conclusion; and the human interest, the bearing of literature upon life and character, dominates the whole, without the least taint of

didacticism. It is a drama of contending forces, set forth with admirable vivacity and with a whiter heat of inspiration than perhaps any of the other poems after 1870. It is a striking proof of Browning's power of throwing himself into the cause which, for the moment, he represents, that many will feel that the case for Aristophanes is stated with more effect than the case for Euripides, although the poet's own sympathies are with the latter.

THE INN ALBUM

Aristophanes' Apology was published in May, 1875; and, by the end of July, Domett was able to record in his diary that Browning had finished nine-tenths of a new poem already (Hall Griffin and Minchin, *Life*, p. 257). The whole poem only occupied two months in composition. During the summer holiday, spent this year at Villers, on the coast of Normandy, the proofs were corrected; and in November, only six months after the publication of his previous volume, *The Inn Album* appeared. It is again a study of a tragedy, and of a tragedy in real and recent life. Domett records that Browning had originally intended to write it in regular dramatic form, but on hearing that Tennyson was engaged on a tragedy, he abandoned the idea and cast his poem into the form of dialogue strung together on a thread of narrative.

There appears to be no evidence to show what

attracted Browning's attention to the subject of this poem. The events on which it was based were not of quite new occurrence. They formed an episode in the career, more notorious than reputable, of Henry William, Lord de Ros, who died in 1839, and Browning told Domett that he had heard the story "thirty odd years ago." The story was not a pleasant one: an old gambler sets out to fleece an inexperienced but wealthy youth, but by the perversity of luck is himself shorn: and he proposes to liquidate his debt by handing over to the youth a lady whom he has himself seduced. In the original story the youth assents, but the lady, on the scheme being broached to her, committed suicide. Browning takes only the general outline of the actual occurrences, and raises the story to a higher plane of dramatic interest and moral value; and the result is a poem which, though it cannot be pleasant, is certainly impressive, and in which the reader's interest is retained right up to the dramatic catastrophe with which it concludes. It has not the grandeur or the poetry or the wide enduring interest of *Aristophanes' Apology;* but in the circumstances of its production it is a remarkable *tour de force*, and a wonderful proof of the vigour and versatility of its author's genius at the age of sixty-three.

INTRODUCTION

THE AGAMEMNON OF AESCHYLUS

In strict chronological order of publication, the *Agamemnon* should follow *Pacchiarotto;* in logical order of evolution it should be placed next to *Aristophanes' Apology*, to which its origin was due. After the publication of the latter, Thomas Carlyle, for whom Browning had the greatest admiration and affection, told him that he ought to translate all the Greek tragedians; and although Browning did not take up the task immediately (his next volume being *The Inn Album*, and that being followed by *Pacchiarotto*), he did eventually (and perhaps concurrently with these) undertake so much of it as to produce this version of what most scholars regard as the masterpiece of the Attic drama. It appeared in the autumn of 1877, the preface (an unusual appearance of the poet in his own person) being dated on October 1st of that year.

It is not likely that Carlyle repeated his recommendation after reading Browning's version of the *Agamemnon;* for indeed it is hard to say much in its favour, and it is not easy to understand the spirit in which it was produced. That Browning felt some explanation to be necessary is evident from his unusual indulgence in a preface; but it cannot be said that the explanation is satisfactory. The principle of translation which he asserts and defends,—"to be literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our

language"—is radically false; for here, as well as elsewhere, is it true that "the letter killeth." It can (unless it is carried so far as to be more obscure than the original) produce a serviceable "crib" to assist the student of the original tongue; it cannot in any true sense "translate" it, or represent it to a person unacquainted with Greek. It was not the method pursued by Browning when dealing with his favourite Euripides; and it may be suspected that his practice is a truer indication of his real feelings than his theory. If he wished to carry further the controversy as to the rival merits of Aeschylus and Euripides, it was hardly fair to weight the scales in this way. A passage in the preface would seem to hint that he wished to discredit the claim of perfection of style which is often made on behalf of the Greeks; but it is difficult to suppose that he considered his method of procedure a fair one. Extreme literalness of translation into a language of wholly different structure and character would ruin the style of the most perfect artists in literature,—of Virgil and Milton, no less than of Aeschylus and Sophocles. The result must stand as a perverse *tour de force*, only partially redeemed by the rough vigour of some of the choric odes.

An additional, and particularly unintelligible, perversity is shown in the metre chosen to represent the Greek iambic. Why Browning should have regarded an eleven-syllabled line,—a blank verse with a superfluous syllable at the end of

each line—as a better counterpart of the Greek metre of six iambic feet (or their equivalent) than ordinary blank verse passes comprehension. The result is peculiarly unfortunate, and gives a monotony to the non-choric passages which is neither fair to the original nor pleasing in itself.

The greater the reader's admiration for Aeschylus and Browning, the deeper must be his regret that their collocation should have done so little justice to either.

It may be observed further, though the matter is of less importance, that Browning is not quite happy in his defence of his method of spelling Greek names. If Greek and English vowel sounds were identical, transliteration would no doubt be the correct procedure; but since they are not, transliteration is often as far from the truth as the more common Latinisation. "Thoukudides," pronounced with the English vowel sounds, is at least as bad as "Thucydides" pronounced with the English consonantal sounds. The reformed pronunciation of classical languages, now generally adopted in English schools, will eventually bring salvation in this matter.

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PORTRAIT

ROBERT BROWNING (AGED 76)

From the bronze medallion by Count Sarto Nitto (1882) *in the possession of Reginald J. Smith, Esq., K.C.* . . FRONTISPIECE

PERSONS IN THE TRANSCRIBED PLAY OF "HERAKLES"

AMPHITRUON
MEGARA
LUKOS
HERAKLES
IRIS
LUTTA (*Madness*)
Messenger
THESEUS

Choros of Aged Thebans

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

INCLUDING

A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES

BEING THE

LAST ADVENTURE OF BALAUSTION

οὐκ ἔσθω κενέβρει' · ὁπόταν δὲ θύῃς τι κάλει με.

I eat no carrion; when you sacrifice
Some cleanly creature—call me for a slice!

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

1875

WIND, wave, and bark, bear Euthukles and me,
Balaustion, from—not sorrow but despair,
Not memory but the present and its pang!
Athenai, live thou hearted in my heart:
Never, while I live, may I see thee more,
Never again may these repugnant orbs
Ache themselves blind before the hideous pomp,
The ghastly mirth which mocked thine overthrow
—Death's entry, Haides' outrage!
Doomed to die,—
Fire should have flung a passion of embrace
About thee till, resplendently inarmed,
(Temple by temple folded to his breast,
All thy white wonder fainting out in ash)
Lightly some vaporous sigh of soul escaped,
And so the Immortals bade Athenai back!
Or earth might sunder and absorb thee, save,
Buried below Olumpos and its gods,
Akropolis to dominate her realm
For Koré, and console the ghosts; or, sea,
What if thy watery plural vastitude,
Rolling unanimous advance, had rushed,
Might upon might, a moment,—stood, one stare,
Sea-face to city-face, thy glaucous wave
Glassing that marbled last magnificence,—
Till fate's pale tremulous foam-flower tipped the grey,

And when wave broke and overswarmed and, sucked
To bounds back, multitudinously ceased,
Let land again breathe unconfused with sea,
Attiké was, Athenai was not now!

Such end I could have borne, for I had shared.
But this which, glanced at, aches within my orbs
To blinding,—bear me thence, bark, wind and wave!
Me, Euthukles, and, hearted in each heart,
Athenai, undisgraced as Pallas' self,
Bear to my birthplace, Helios' island-bride,
Zeus' darling: thither speed us, homeward-bound,
Wafted already twelve hours' sail away
From horror, nearer by one sunset Rhodes!

Why should despair be? Since, distinct above
Man's wickedness and folly, flies the wind
And floats the cloud, free transport for our soul
Out of its fleshly durance dim and low,—
Since disembodied soul anticipates
(Thought-borne as now, in rapturous unrestraint)
Above all crowding, crystal silentness,
Above all noise, a silver solitude:—
Surely, where thought so bears soul, soul in time
May permanently bide, "assert the wise,"
There live in peace, there work in hope once more—
O nothing doubt, Philemon! Greed and strife,
Hatred and cark and care, what place have they
In yon blue liberality of heaven?
How the sea helps! How rose-smit earth will rise
Breast-high thence, some bright morning, and be Rhodes!
Heaven, earth and sea, my warrant—in their name,
Believe—o'er falsehood, truth is surely sphered,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

O'er ugliness beams beauty, o'er this world
Extends that realm where, "as the wise assert,"
Philemon, thou shalt see Euripides
Clearer than mortal sense perceived the man!

A sunset nearer Rhodes, by twelve hours' sweep
Of surge secured from horror? Rather say,
Quieted out of weakness into strength.
I dare invite, survey the scene my sense
Staggered to apprehend: for, disenvolved
From the mere outside anguish and contempt,
Slowly a justice centred in a doom
Reveals itself. Ay, pride succumbed to pride,
Oppression met the oppressor and was matched.
Athenai's vaunt braved Sparté's violence
Till, in the shock, prone fell Peiraios, low
Rampart and bulwark lay, as,—timing stroke
Of hammer, axe, and beam hoist, poised and swung,—
The very flute-girls blew their laughing best,
In dance about the conqueror while he bade
Music and merriment help enginery
Batter down, break to pieces all the trust
Of citizens once, slaves now. See what walls
Play substitute for the long double range
Themistoklean, heralding a guest
From harbour on to citadel! Each side
Their senseless walls demolished stone by stone,
See,—outer wall as stonelike,—heads and hearts,—
Athenai's terror-stricken populace!
Prattlers, tongue-tied in crouching abjectness,—
Braggarts, who wring hands wont to flourish swords—
Sophist and rhetorician, demagogue,
(Argument dumb, authority a jest)
Dikast and heliast, pleader, litigant,

Quack-priest, sham-prophecy-retailer, scout
Ō' the customs, sycophant, whate'er the style,
Altar-scrap-snatcher, pimp and parasite,—
Rivalities at truce now each with each,
Stupefied mud-banks,—such an use they serve!
While the one order which performs exact
To promise, functions faithful last as first,
What is it but the city's lyric troop,
Chantress and psaltress, flute-girl, dancing-girl?
Athenai's harlotry takes laughing care
Their patron miss no pipings, late she loved,
But deathward tread at least the kordax-step.

Die then, who pulled such glory on your heads!
There let it grind to powder! Perikles!
The living are the dead now: death be life!
Why should the sunset yonder waste its wealth?
Prove thee Olympian! If my heart supply
Inviolate the structure,—true to type,
Build me some spirit-place no flesh shall find,
As Pheidias may inspire thee: slab on slab,
Renew Athenai, quarry out the cloud,
Convert to gold yon west extravagance!
'Neath Propulaia, from Akropolis
By vapoury grade and grade, gold all the way,
Step to thy snow-Pnux, mount thy Bema-cloud,
Thunder and lighten thence a Hellas through
That shall be better and more beautiful
And too august for Sparté's foot to spurn!
Chasmed in the crag, again our Theatre
Predominates, one purple: Staghunt-month,
Brings it not Dionusia? Hail, the Three!
Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides
Compete, gain prize or lose prize, godlike still.
Nay, lest they lack the old god-exercise—
Their noble want the unworthy,—as of old,

(How otherwise should patience crown their might?)
What if each find his ape promoted man,
His censor raised for antic service still?
Some new Hermippos to pelt Perikles,
Kratinos to swear Pheidias robbed a shrine,
Eruxis—I suspect, Euripides,
No brow will ache because with mop and mow
He gibes my poet! There 's a dog-faced dwarf
That gets to godship somehow, yet retains
His apehood in the Egyptian hierarchy,
More decent, indecorous just enough:
Why should not dog-ape, graced in due degree,
Grow Momos as thou Zeus? Or didst thou sigh
Rightly with thy Makaria? "After life,
Better no sentiency than turbulence;
Death cures the low contention." Be it so!
Yet progress means contention, to my mind.
Euthukles, who, except for love that speaks,
Art silent by my side while words of mine
Provoke that foe from which escape is vain
Henceforward, wake Athenai's fate and fall,—
Memories asleep as, at the altar-foot
Those Furies in the Oresteian song,—
Do I amiss who, wanting strength, use craft,
Advance upon the foe I cannot fly,
Nor feign a snake is dormant though it gnaw?
That fate and fall, once bedded in our brain,
Roots itself past upwrenching; but coaxed forth,
Encouraged out to practise fork and fang,—
Perhaps, when satiate with prompt sustenance,
It may pine, likelier die than if left swell
In peace by our pretension to ignore,
Or pricked to threefold fury, should our stamp
Bruise and not brain the pest.

A middle course!
What hinders that we treat this tragic theme
As the Three taught when either woke some woe,
—How Klutaimnestra hated, what the pride
Of Iokasté, why Medeia clove
Nature asunder. Small rebuked by large,
We felt our puny hates refine to air,
Our poor prides sink, prevent the humbling hand,
Our petty passions purify their tide.
So, Euthukles, permit the tragedy
To re-enact itself, this voyage through,
Till sunsets end and sunrise brighten Rhodes!
Majestic on the stage of memory,
Peplosed and kothorned, let Athenai fall
Once more, nay, oft again till life conclude,
Lent for the lesson: Choros, I and thou!
What else in life seems piteous any more
After such pity, or proves terrible
Beside such terror?

Still—since Phrunichos
Offended, by too premature a touch
Of that Milesian smart-place freshly frayed—
(Ah, my poor people, whose prompt remedy
Was—fine the poet, not reform thyself!)
Beware precipitate approach! Rehearse
Rather the prologue, well a year away,
Than the main misery, a sunset old.
What else but fitting prologue to the piece
Style an adventure, stranger than my first
By so much as the issue it enwombed
Lurked big beyond Balaustion's littleness?
Second supreme adventure! O that Spring,
That eve I told the earlier to my friends!
Where are the four now, with each red-ripe mouth
Crumpled so close, no quickest breath it fetched

Could disengage the lip-flower furled to bud
For fear Admetos,—shivering head and foot,
As with sick soul and blind averted face
He trusted hand forth to obey his friend,—
Should find no wife in her cold hand's response,
Nor see the disenshrouded statue start
Alkestis, live the life and love the love!
I wonder, does the streamlet ripple still,
Outsmoothing galingale and watermint
Its mat-floor? while at brim, 'twixt sedge and sedge,
What bubblings past Baccheion, broadened much,
Pricked by the reed and fretted by the fly,
Oared by the boatman-spider's pair of arms!
Lenaia was a gladsome month ago—
Euripides had taught "Andromedé:"
Next month, would teach "Kresphontes"—which same month
Someone from Phokis, who companioned me
Since all that happened on those temple-steps,
Would marry me and turn Athenian too.
Now! if next year the masters let the slaves
Do Bacchic service and restore mankind
That trilogy whereof, 't is noised, one play
Presents the Bacchai,—no Euripides
Will teach the choros, nor shall we be tinged
By any such grand sunset of his soul,
Exiles from dead Athenai,—not the live
That 's in the cloud there with the new-born star!

Speak to the infinite intelligence,
Sing to the everlasting sympathy!
Winds belly sail, and drench of dancing brine
Buffet our boat-side, so the prore bound free!
Condense our voyage into one great day
Made up of sunset-closes: eve by eve,
Resume that memorable night-discourse

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

When,—like some meteor brilliance, fire and filth,
Or say, his own Amphitheos, deity
And dung, who, bound on the gods' embassage,
Got men's acknowledgment in kick and cuff—
We made acquaintance with a visitor
Ominous, apparitional, who went
Strange as he came, but shall not pass away.
Let us attempt that memorable talk,
Clothe the adventure's every incident
With due expression : may not looks be told,
Gesture made speak, and speech so amplified
That words find blood-warmth which, cold-writ, they lose?

Recall the night we heard the news from Thrace,
One year ago, Athenai still herself.

We two were sitting silent in the house,
Yet cheerless hardly. Euthukles, forgive!
I somehow speak to unseen auditors.
Not *you*, but—Euthukles had entered, grave,
Grand, may I say, as who brings laurel-branch
And message from the tripod : such it proved.

He first removed the garland from his brow,
Then took my hand and looked into my face.

"Speak good words!" much misgiving faltered I.

"Good words, the best, Balaustion! He is crowned,
Gone with his Attic ivy home to feast,
Since Aischulos required companionship.
Pour a libation for Euripides!"

When we had sat the heavier silence out—
"Dead and triumphant still!" began reply

To my eye's question. "As he willed he worked:
And, as he worked, he wanted not, be sure,
Triumph his whole life through, submitting work
To work's right judges, never to the wrong—
To competency, not ineptitude.
When he had run life's proper race and worked
Quite to the stade's end, there remained to try
The stade's turn, should strength dare the double course.
Half the diaulos reached, the hundred plays
Accomplished, force in its rebound sufficed
To lift along the athlete and ensure
A second wreath, proposed by fools for first,
The statist's olive as the poet's bay.
Wiselier, he suffered not a twofold aim
Retard his pace, confuse his sight, at once
Poet and statist; though the multitude
Girded him ever 'All thine aim thine art?
The idle poet only? No regard
For civic duty, public service, here?
We drop our ballot-bean for Sophokles!
Not only could he write "Antigoné,"
But—since (we argued) whoso penned that piece
Might just as well conduct a squadron,—straight
Good-naturedly he took on him command,
Got laughed at, and went back to making plays,
Having allowed us our experiment
Respecting the fit use of faculty.'
No whit the more did athlete slacken pace.
Soon the jeers grew: 'Cold hater of his kind,
A sea-cave suits him, not the vulgar hearth!
What need of tongue-talk, with a bookish store
Would stock ten cities?' Shadow of an ass!
No whit the worse did athlete touch the mark
And, at the turning-point, consign his scorn
O' the scorners to that final trilogy

'Hupsipulé,' 'Phoinissai,' and the Match
Of Life Contemplative with Active Life,
Zethos against Amphion. Ended so?
Nowise!—began again; for heroes rest
Dropping shield's oval o'er the entire man,
And he who thus took Contemplation's prize
Turned stade-point but to face Activity.
Out of all shadowy hands extending help
For life's decline pledged to youth's labour still,
Whatever renovation flatter age,—
Society with pastime, solitude
With peace,—he chose the hand that gave the heart,
Bade Macedonian Archelaos take
The leavings of Athenai, ash once flame.
For fifty politicians' frosty work,
One poet's ash proved ample and to spare:
He propped the state and filled the treasury,
Counselled the king as might a meaner soul,
Furnished the friend with what shall stand in stead
Of crown and sceptre, star his name about
When these are dust; for him, Euripides
Last the old hand on the old phorminx flung,
Clashed thence 'Alkaion,' maddened 'Pentheus' up;
Then music sighed itself away, one moan
Iphigeneia made by Aulis' strand;
With her and music died Euripides.

"The poet-friend who followed him to Thrace,
Agathon, writes thus much: the merchant-ship
Moreover brings a message from the king
To young Euripides, who went on board
This morning at Mounuchia: all is true."

I said "Thank Zeus for the great news and good!"

"Nay, the report is running in brief fire
Through the town's stubbly furrow," he resumed:

—"Entertains brightly what their favourite styles
'The City of Gapers' for a week perhaps,
Supplants three luminous tales, but yesterday
Pronounced sufficient lamps to last the month:
How Glauketes, outbidding Morsimos,
Paid market-price for one Kopaic eel
A thousand drachmai, and then cooked his prize
Not proper conger-fashion but in oil
And nettles, as man fries the foam-fish-kind;
How all the captains of the triremes, late
Victors at Arginousai, on return
Will, for reward, be straightway put to death;
How Mikon wagered a Thessalian mime,
Trained him by Lais, looked on as complete,
Against Leogoras' blood-mare koppa-marked,
Valued six talents,—swore, accomplished so,
The girl could swallow at a draught, nor breathe,
A choinix of unmixed Mendesian wine;
And having lost the match will—dine on herbs!
Three stories late a-flame, at once extinct,
Outblazed by just 'Euripides is dead'!

"I met the concourse from the Theatre,
The audience flocking homeward: victory
Again awarded Aristophanes
Precisely for his old play chopped and changed
'The Female Celebrators of the Feast'—
That Thesmophoria, tried a second time.
'Never such full success!'—assured the folk,
Who yet stopped praising to have word of mouth
With 'Euthukles, the bard's own intimate,
Balaustion's husband, the right man to ask.'

"'Dead, yes, but how dead, may acquaintance know?
You were the couple constant at his cave:

Tell us now, is it true that women, moved
By reason of his liking Krateros . . .'

"I answered 'He was loved by Sokrates.'

"'Nay,' said another, 'envy did the work!
For, emulating poets of the place,
One Arridaios, one Krateues, both
Established in the royal favour, these . . .'

"Protagoras instructed him," said I.

"'*Phu*,' whistled Comic Platon, 'hear the fact!
'T was well said of your friend by Sophokles
"He hate our women? In his verse, belike:
But when it comes to prose-work,—ha, ha, ha!"
New climes don't change old manners: so, it chanced,
Pursuing an intrigue one moonless night
With Arethousian Nikodikos' wife,
(Come now, his years were simply seventy-five)
Crossing the palace-court, what haps he on
But Archelaos' pack of hungry hounds?
Who tore him piecemeal ere his cry brought help.'

"I asked: Did not you write 'The Festivals'?
You best know what dog tore him when alive.
You others, who now make a ring to hear,
Have not you just enjoyed a second treat,
Proclaimed that ne'er was play more worthy prize
Than this, myself assisted at, last year,
And gave its worth to,—spitting on the same?
Appraise no poetry,—price cuttlefish,
Or that seaweed-alphestes, scorpion-sort,
Much famed for mixing mud with fantasy
On midnights! I interpret no foul dreams."

If so said Euthukles, so could not I,
Balaustion, say. After "Lusistraté"
No more for me of "people's privilege,"
No witnessing "the Grand old Comedy
Coëval with our freedom, which, curtailed,
Were freedom's deathblow: relic of the past,
When Virtue laughingly told truth to Vice,
Uncensured, since the stern mouth, stuffed with flowers,
Through poetry breathed satire, perfumed blast
Which sense snuffed up while searched unto the bone!"
I was a stranger: "For first joy," urged friends,
"Go hear our Comedy, some patriot piece
That plies the selfish advocates of war
With argument so unevadable
That crash fall Kleons whom the finer play
Of reason, tickling, deeper wounds no whit
Than would a spear-thrust from a savory-stalk!
No: you hear knave and fool told crime and fault,
And see each scourged his quantity of stripes.
'Rough dealing, awkward language,' whine our fops:
The world's too squeamish now to bear plain words
Concerning deeds it acts with gust enough:
But, thanks to wine-lees and democracy,
We 've still our stage where truth calls spade a spade!
Ashamed? Phuromachos' decree provides
The sex may sit discreetly, witness all,
Sorted, the good with good, the gay with gay,
Themselves unseen, no need to force a blush.
A Rhodian wife and ignorant so long?
Go hear next play!"
I heard "Lusistraté."
Waves, said to wash pollution from the world,

Take that plague-memory, cure that pustule caught
As, past escape, I sat and saw the piece
By one appalled at Phaidra's fate,—the chaste,
Whom, because chaste, the wicked goddess chained
To that same serpent of unchastity
She loathed most, and who, coiled so, died distraught
Rather than make submission, loose one limb
Love-wards, at lambency of honeyed tongue,
Or torture of the scales which scraped her snow
—I say, the piece by him who charged this piece
(Because Euripides shrank not to teach,
If gods be strong and wicked, man, though weak,
May prove their match by willing to be good)
With infamies the Scythian's whip should cure—
"Such outrage done the public—Phaidra named!
Such purpose to corrupt ingenuous youth,
Such insult cast on female character!"—
Why, when I saw that bestiality—
So beyond all brute-beast imagining,
That when, to point the moral at the close,
Poor Salabaccho, just to show how fair
Was "Reconciliation," stripped her charms,
That exhibition simply bade us breathe,
Seemed something healthy and commendable
After obscenity grotesqued so much
It slunk away revolted at itself.
Henceforth I had my answer when our sage
Pattern-proposing seniors pleaded grave
"You fail to fathom here the deep design!
All 's acted in the interest of truth,
Religion, and those manners old and dear
Which made our city great when citizens
Like Aristeides and like Miltiades
Wore each a golden tettix in his hair."
What do they wear now under—Kleophon?

Well, for such reasons,—I am out of breath,
But loathsomeness we needs must hurry past,—
I did not go to see, nor then nor now,
The "Thesmophoriazousai." But, since males
Choose to brave first, blame afterward, nor brand
Without fair taste of what they stigmatize,
Euthukles had not missed the first display,
Original portrait of Euripides
By "Virtue laughingly reproving Vice":
"Virtue,"—the author, Aristophanes,
Who mixed an image out of his own depths,
Ticketed as I tell you. Oh, this time
No more pretension to recondite worth!
No joke in aid of Peace, no demagogue
Pun-pelleted from Pnux, no kordax-dance
Overt helped covertly the Ancient Faith!
All now was muck, home-produce, honestman
The author's soul secreted to a play
Which gained the prize that day we heard the death.

I thought "How thoroughly death alters things!
Where is the wrong now, done our dead and great?
How natural seems grandeur in relief,
Cliff-base with frothy spites against its calm!"

Euthukles interposed—he read my thought—

"O'er them, too, in a moment came the change.
The crowd 's enthusiastic, to a man:
Since, rake as such may please the ordure-heap
Because of certain sparkles presumed ore,
At first flash of true lightning overhead,
They look up, nor resume their search too soon.
The insect-scattering sign is evident,
And nowhere winks a fire-fly rival now,
Nor bustles any beetle of the brood
With trundled dung-ball meant to menace heaven.

Contrariwise, the cry is 'Honour him!'
'A statue in the theatre!' wants one;
Another 'Bring the poet's body back,
Bury him in Peiraios: o'er his tomb
Let Alkamenes carve the music-witch,
The songstress-seiren, meed of melody:
Thoukudides invent his epitaph!'
To-night the whole town pays its tribute thus."

Our tribute should not be the same, my friend!
Statue? Within our heart he stood, he stands!
As for the vest outgrown now by the form,
Low flesh that clothed high soul,—a vesture's fate—
Why, let it fade, mix with the elements
There where it, falling, freed Euripides!
But for the soul that 's tutelary now
Till time end, o'er the world to teach and bless—
How better hail its freedom than by first
Singing, we two, its own song back again,
Up to that face from which flowed beauty—face
Now abler to see triumph and take love
Than when it glorified Athenai once?

The sweet and strange Alkestis, which saved me,
Secured me—you, ends nowise, to my mind,
In pardon of Admetos. Hearts are fain
To follow cheerful weary Herakles
Striding away from the huge gratitude,
Club shouldered, lion-fleece round loin and flank,
Bound on the next new labour "height o'er height
Ever surmounting,—destiny's decree!"
Thither He helps us: that 's the story's end;
He smiling said so, when I told him mine—
My great adventure, how Alkestis helped.
Afterward, when the time for parting fell,
He gave me, with two other precious gifts,

This third and best, consummating the grace,
"Herakles," writ by his own hand, each line.
"If it have worth, reward is still to seek.
Somebody, I forget who, gained the prize
And proved arch-poet: time must show!" he smiled:
"Take this, and, when the noise tires out, judge me—
Some day, not slow to dawn, when somebody—
Who? I forget—proves nobody at all!"

Is not that day come? What if you and I
Re-sing the song, inaugurate the fame?
We have not waited to acquaint ourselves
With song and subject; we can prologuize
How, at Eurustheus' bidding,—hate strained hard,—
Herakles had departed, one time more,
On his last labour, worst of all the twelve;
Descended into Haides, thence to drag
The triple-headed hound, which sun should see
Spite of the god whose darkness whelped the Fear.
Down went the hero, "back—how should he come?"
So laughed King Lukos, an old enemy,
Who judged that absence testified defeat
Of the land's loved one,—since he saved the land
And for that service wedded Megara
Daughter of Thebai, realm her child should rule.
Ambition, greed and malice seized their prey,
The Heracleian House, defenceless left,
Father and wife and child, to trample out
Trace of its hearth-fire: since extreme old age
Wakes pity, woman's wrong wins championship,
And child may grow up man and take revenge.

Hence see we that, from out their palace-home
Hunted, for last resource they cluster now
Couched on the cold ground, hapless supplicants
About their courtyard altar,—Household Zeus
It is, the Three in funeral garb beseech,
Delaying death so, till deliverance come—
When did it ever?—from the deep and dark.
And thus breaks silence old Amphitruon's voice. . . .
Say I not true thus far, my Euthukles?

Suddenly, torch-light! knocking at the door,
Loud, quick, "Admittance for the revels' lord!"
Some unintelligible Komos-cry—
Raw-flesh red, no cap upon his head,
Dionusos, Bacchos, Phales, Iacchos,
In let him reel with the kid-skin at his heel,
Where it buries in the spread of the bushy myrtle-bed!
(Our Rhodian Jackdaw-song was sense to that!)
Then laughter, outbursts ruder and more rude,
Through which, with silver point, a fluting pierced,
And ever "Open, open, Bacchos bids!"

But at last—one authoritative word,
One name of an immense significance:
For Euthukles rose up, threw wide the door.

There trooped the Choros of the Comedy
Crowned and triumphant; first, those flushed Fifteen
Men that wore women's garb, grotesque disguise.
Then marched the Three,—who played Mnesilochos,
Who, Toxotes, and who, robed right, masked rare,
Monkeyed our Great and Dead to heart's content
That morning in Athenai. Masks were down
And robes doffed now; the sole disguise was drink.

Mixing with these—I know not what gay crowd,
Girl-dancers, flute-boys, and pre-eminent
Among them,—doubtless draped with such reserve
As stopped fear of the fifty-drachma fine
(Beside one's name on public fig-tree nailed)
Which women pay who in the streets walk bare,—
Behold Elaphion of the Persic dance!
Who lately had frisked fawn-foot, and the rest,
—All for the Patriot Cause, the Antique Faith,
The Conservation of True Poesy—
Could I but penetrate the deep design!
Elaphion, more Peiraios-known as "Phaps,"
Tripped at the head of the whole banquet-band
Who came in front now, as the first fell back;
And foremost—the authoritative voice,
The revels-leader, he who gained the prize,
And got the glory of the Archon's feast—
There stood in person Aristophanes.

And no ignoble presence! On the bulge
Of the clear baldness,—all his head one brow,—
True, the veins swelled, blue network, and there surged
A red from cheek to temple,—then retired
As if the dark-leaved chaplet damped a flame,—
Was never nursed by temperance or health.
But huge the eyeballs rolled back native fire,
Imperiously triumphant: nostrils wide
Waited their incense; while the pursed mouth's spout
Aggressive, while the beak supreme above,
While the head, face, nay, pillared throat thrown back,
Beard whitening under like a vinous foam,
These made a glory, of such insolence—
I thought,—such domineering deity
Hephaistos might have carved to cut the brine

For his gay brother's prow, imbrue that path
Which, purpling, recognized the conqueror.
Impudent and majestic: drunk, perhaps,
But that 's religion; sense too plainly snuffed:·
Still, sensuality was grown a rite.

What I had disbelieved most proved most true.
There was a mind here, mind a-wantoning
At ease of undisputed mastery
Over the body's brood, those appetites.
Oh but he grasped them grandly, as the god
His either struggling handful,—hurtless snakes
Held deep down, strained hard off from side and side!
Mastery his, theirs simply servitude,
So well could firm fist help intrepid eye.
Fawning and fulsome, had they licked and hissed?
At mandate of one muscle, order reigned.
They had been wreathing much familiar now
About him on his entry; but a squeeze
Choked down the pests to place: their lord stood free.
Forward he stepped: I rose and fronted him.

"Hail, house, the friendly to Euripides!"
(So he began) "Hail, each inhabitant!
You, lady? What, the Rhodian? Form and face,
Victory's self upsoaring to receive
The poet? Right they named you . . . some rich name,
Vowel-buds thorned about with consonants,
Fragrant, felicitous, rose-glow enriched
By the Isle's unguent: some diminished end
In *ion*, Kallistion? delicater still,
Kubelion or Melittion,—or, suppose

(Less vulgar love than bee or violet)
Phibalion, for the mouth split red-fig-wise,
Korakinidion for the coal-black hair,
Nettarion, Phabion for the darlingness?
But no, it was some fruit-flower, Rhoidion . . . ha,
We near the balsam-bloom—Balaustion! Thanks,
Rhodes! Folk have called me Rhodian, do you know?
Not fools so far! Because, if Helios wived,
As Pindaros sings somewhere prettily,
Here blooms his offspring, earth-flesh with sun-fire,
Rhodes' blood and Helios' gold. My phorminx, boy!
Why does the boy hang back and baulk an ode
Tiptoe at spread of wing? But like enough,
Sunshine frays torchlight. Witness whom you scare,
Superb Balaustion! Look outside the house!
Pho, you have quenched my Komos by first frown,
Struck dead all joyance: not a fluting puffs
From idle cheekband! Ah, my Choros too?
You 've eaten cuckoo-apple! Dumb, you dogs?
So much good Thasian wasted on your throats
And out of them not one *Threttanelo?*
Neblaretai! Because this earth-and-sun
Product looks wormwood and all bitter herbs?
Well, do I blench, though me she hates the most
Of mortals? By the cabbage, off they slink!
You, too, my Chrusomelolonthion-Phaps,
Girl-goldling-beetle-beauty? You, abashed,
Who late, supremely unabashable,
Propped up my play at that important point
When Artamouxia tricks the Toxotes?
Ha, ha,—thank Hermes for the lucky throw,—
We came last comedy of the whole seven,
So went all fresh to judgment well-disposed

For who should fatly feast them, eye and ear,
We two between us! What, you fail your friend?
Away then, free me of your cowardice!
Go, get you the goat's breakfast! Fare afield,
Ye circumcised of Egypt, pigs to sow,
Back to the Priest's or forward to the crows,
So you but rid me of such company!
Once left alone, I can protect myself
From statuesque Balaustion pedestalled
On much disapprobation and mistake!
She dares not beat the sacred brow, beside!
Bacchos' equipment, ivy safeguards well
As Phoibos' bay.

"They take me at my word!
One comfort is, I shall not want them long,
The Archon's cry creaks, creaks, 'Curtail expense!'
The war wants money, year the twenty-sixth!
Cut down our Choros number, clip costume,
Save birds' wings, beetles' armour, spend the cash
In three-crest skull-caps, three days' salt-fish-slice,
Three-banked-ships for these sham-ambassadors,
And what not: any cost but Comedy's!
'No Choros'—soon will follow; what care I?
Archinos and Agurrhios, scrape your flint,
Flay your dead dog, and curry favour so!
Choros in rags, with loss of leather next,
We lose the boys' vote, lose the song and dance,
Lose my Elaphion! Still, the actor stays.
Save but my acting, and the baldhead bard
Kudathenaian and Pandionid,
Son of Philippos, Aristophanes
Surmounts his rivals now as heretofore,
Though stinted to mere sober prosy verse—
'Manners and men,' so squeamish gets the world!
No more 'Step forward, strip for anapæsts!'

No calling naughty people by their names,
No tickling audience into gratitude
With chickpease, barleygroats and nuts and plums,
No setting Salabaccho . . ."

As I turned—

"True, lady, I am tolerably drunk:
The proper inspiration! Otherwise,—
Phrunichos, Choirilos!—had Aischulos
So foiled you at the goat-song? Drink 's a god.
How else did that old doating driveller
Kratinos foil me, match my masterpiece
The 'Clouds'? I swallowed cloud-distilment—dew
Undimmed by any grape-blush, knit my brow
And gnawed my style and laughed my learnedest;
While he worked at his 'Willow-wicker-flask,'
Swigging at that same flask by which he swore,
Till, sing and empty, sing and fill again,
Somehow result was—what it should not be
Next time, I promised him and kept my word!
Hence, brimful now of Thasian . . . I 'll be bound,
Mendesian, merely: triumph-night, you know,
The High Priest entertains the conqueror,
And, since war worsens all things, stingily
The rascal starves whom he is bound to stuff,
Choros and actors and their lord and king
The poet; supper, still he needs must spread—
And this time all was conscientious fare:
He knew his man, his match, his master—made
Amends, spared neither fish, flesh, fowl nor wine:
So merriment increased, I promise you,
Till—something happened."

Here he strangely paused.

"After that,—well, it either was the cup
To the Good Genius, our concluding pledge,
That wrought me mischief, decently unmixed,—
Or, what if, when *that* happened, need arose
Of new libation? Did you only know
What happened! Little wonder I am drunk."

Euthukles, o'er the boat-side, quick, what change,
Watch, in the water! But a second since,
It laughed a ripply spread of sun and sea,
Ray fused with wave, to never disunite.
Now, sudden all the surface, hard and black,
Lies a quenched light, dead motion: what the cause?
Look up and lo, the menace of a cloud
Has solemnized the sparkling, spoiled the sport!
Just so, some overshadow, some new care
Stopped all the mirth and mocking on his face
And left there only such a dark surmise
—No wonder if the revel disappeared,
So did his face shed silence every side!
I recognized a new man fronting me.

"So!" he smiled, piercing to my thought at once,
"You see myself? Balaustion's fixed regard
Can strip the proper Aristophanes
Of what our sophists, in their jargon, style
His accidents? My soul sped forth but now
To meet your hostile survey,—soul unseen,
Yet veritably cinct for soul-defence
With satyr sportive quips, cranks, boss and spike,
Just as my visible body paced the street,
Environed by a boon companionship
Your apparition also puts to flight.
Well, what care I if, unaccoutred twice,
I front my foe—no comicality

Round soul, and body-guard in banishment?
Thank your eyes' searching, undisguised I stand:
The merest female child may question me.
Spare not, speak bold, Balaustion!"

I did speak:

"Bold speech be—welcome to this honoured hearth,
Good Genius! Glory of the poet, glow
O' the humourist who castigates his kind,
Suave summer-lightning lambency which plays
On stag-horned tree, misshapen crag askew,
Then vanishes with unvindictive smile
After a moment's laying black earth bare.
Splendour of wit that springs a thunderball—
Satire—to burn and purify the world,
True aim, fair purpose: just wit justly strikes
Injustice,—right, as rightly quells the wrong,
Finds out in knaves', fools', cowards' armoury
The tricky tinselled place fire flashes through,
No damage else, sagacious of true ore;
Wit, learned in the laurel, leaves each wreath
O'er lyric shell or tragic barbiton,—
Though alien gauds be singed,—undesecrate,
The genuine solace of the sacred brow.
Ay, and how pulses flame a patriot-star
Steadfast athwart our country's night of things,
To beacon, would she trust no meteor-blaze,
Athenai from the rock she steers for straight!
O light, light, light, I hail light everywhere,
No matter for the murk that was,—perchance,
That will be,—certes, never should have been
Such orb's associate!

"Aristophanes!
'The merest female child may question you?'

Once, in my Rhodes, a portent of the wave
Appalled our coast : for many a darkened day,
Intolerable mystery and fear.
Who snatched a furtive glance through crannied peak,
Could but report of snake-scale, lizard-limb,—
So swam what, making whirlpools as it went,
Madded the brine with wrath or monstrous sport.
''T is Tuphon, loose, unmanacled from mount,'
Declared the priests, 'no way appeasable
Unless perchance by virgin sacrifice!'
Thus grew the terror and o'erhung the doom—
Until one eve a certain female-child
Strayed in safe ignorance to seacoast edge,
And there sat down and sang to please herself.
When all at once, large-looming from his wave,
Out leaned, chin hand-propped, pensive on the ledge,
A sea-worn face, sad as mortality,
Divine with yearning after fellowship.
He rose but breast-high. So much god she saw ;
So much she sees now, and does reverence!"

Ah, but there followed tail-splash, frisk of fin!
Let cloud pass, the sea's ready laugh outbreaks.
No very godlike trace retained the mouth
Which mocked with—

"So, He taught you tragedy!
I always asked 'Why may not women act?'
Nay, wear the comic visor just as well ;
Or, better, quite cast off the face-disguise
And voice-distortion, simply look and speak,
Real women playing women as men—men!
I shall not wonder if things come to that,
Some day when I am distant far enough.

Do you conceive the quite new Comedy
When laws allow? laws only let girls dance,
Pipe, posture,—above all, Elaphionize,
Provided they keep decent—that is, dumb.
Ay, and, conceiving, I would execute,
Had I but two lives: one were overworked!
How penetrate encrusted prejudice,
Pierce ignorance three generations thick
Since first Sousarion crossed our boundary?
He battered with a big Megaric stone;
Chionides felled oak and rough-hewed thence
This club I wield now, having spent my life
In planing knobs and sticking studs to shine;
Somebody else must try mere polished steel!"

Emboldened by the sober mood's return,
"Meanwhile," said I, "since planed and studded club
Once more has pashed competitors to dust,
And poet proves triumphant with that play
Euthukles found last year unfortunate,—
Does triumph spring from smoothness still more smoothed,
Fresh studs sown thick and threefold? In plain words,
Have you exchanged brute-blows,—which teach the brute
Man may surpass him in brutality,—
For human fighting, or true god-like force
Which breathes persuasion nor needs fight at all?
Have you essayed attacking ignorance,
Convicting folly, by their opposites,
Knowledge and wisdom? not by yours for ours,
Fresh ignorance and folly, new for old,
Greater for less, your crime for our mistake!
If so success at last have crowned desert,

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Bringing surprise (dashed haply by concern
At your discovery such wild waste of strength
—And what strength!—went so long to keep in
vogue
Such warfare—and what warfare!—shamed so fast,
So soon made obsolete, as fell their foe
By the first arrow native to the orb,
First onslaught worthy Aristophanes)—
Was this conviction's entry that same strange
'Somethingthathappened'toconfoundyourfeast?"

"Ah, did he witness then my play that failed,
First 'Thesmophoriazousai'? Well and good!
But did he also see,—your Euthukles,—
My 'Grasshoppers' which followed and failed too,
Three months since, at the 'Little-in-the-Fields'?"

"To say that he did see that First—should say
He never cared to see its following."

"There happens to be reason why I wrote
First play and second also. Ask the cause!
I warrant you receive ere talk be done,
Fit answer, authorizing either act.
But here 's the point: as Euthukles made vow
Never again to taste my quality,
So I was minded next experiment
Should tickle palate—yea, of Euthukles!
Not by such utter change, such absolute
A topsyturvy of stage-habitude
As you and he want,—Comedy built fresh,
By novel brick and mortar, base to roof,—
No, for I stand too near and look too close!
Pleasure and pastime yours, spectators brave,
Should I turn art's fixed fabric upside down!
Little you guess how such tough work tasks soul!

Not overtasks, though : give fit strength fair play,
And strength 's a demiourgos ! Art renewed ?
Ay, in some closet where strength shuts out—first
The friendly faces, sympathetic cheer :
' More of the old provision none supplies
So bounteously as thou,—our love, our pride,
Our author of the many a perfect piece !
Stick to that standard, change were decadence !'
Next, the unfriendly : ' This time, strain will tire,
He 's fresh, Ameipsias thy antagonist !'
—Or better, in some Salaminian cave
Where sky and sea and solitude make earth
And man and noise one insignificance,
Let strength propose itself,—behind the world,—
Sole prize worth winning, work that satisfies
Strength it has dared and done strength's uttermost!
After which,—clap-to closet and quit cave,—
Strength may conclude in Archelaos' court,
And yet esteem the silken company
So much sky-scud, sea-froth, earth-thistledown,
For aught their praise or blame should joy or grieve.
Strength amid crowds as late in solitude
May lead the still life, ply the wordless task :
Then only, when seems need to move or speak,
Moving—for due respect, when statesmen pass,
(Strength, in the closet, watched how spiders spin)
Speaking—when fashion shows intelligence,
(Strength, in the cave, oft whistled to the gulls)
In short, has learnt first, practised afterwards !
Despise the world and reverence yourself,—
Why, you may unmake things and remake things,
And throw behind you, unconcerned enough,
What 's made or marred : 'you teach men, are not taught !'
So marches off the stage Euripides !

"No such thin fare feeds flesh and blood like mine,
No such faint fume of fancy sates my soul,
No such seclusion, closet, cave or court,
Suits either: give me Iostephanos
Worth making happy what coarse way she will—
O happy-maker, when her cries increase
About the favourite! 'Aristophanes!
More grist to mill, here 's Kleophon to grind!
He 's for refusing peace, though Sparté cede
Even Dekeleia! Here 's Kleonumos
Declaring—though he threw away his shield,
He 'll thrash you till you lay your lyre aside!
Orestes bids mind where you walk of nights—
He wants your cloak as you his cudgelling:
Here 's, finally, Melanthios fat with fish,
The gormandizer-spendthrift-dramatist!
So, bustle! Pounce on opportunity!
Let fun a-screaming in Parabasis,
Find food for folk agape at either end,
Mad for amusement! Times grow better too,
And should they worsen, why, who laughs, forgets.
In no case, venture boy-experiments!
Old wine 's the wine: new poetry drinks raw:
Two plays a season is your pledge, beside;
So, give us 'Wasps' again, grown hornets now!'"

Then he changed.

"Do you so detect in me—
Brow-bald, chin-bearded, me, curved cheek, carved lip,
Or where soul sits and reigns in either eye—
What suits the—stigma, I say,—style say you,
Of 'Wine-lees-poet'? Bravest of buffoons,
Less blunt than Telekleides, less obscene
Than Murtilos, Hermippos: quite a match
In elegance for Eupolis himself,

Yet pungent as Kratinos at his best?
Graced with traditional immunity
Ever since, much about my grandsire's time,
Some funny village-man in Megara,
Lout-lord and clown-king, used a privilege,
As due religious drinking-bouts came round,
To daub his phyz,—no, that was afterward,—
He merely mounted cart with mates of choice
And traversed country, taking house by house,
At night,—because of danger in the freak,—
Then hollaed 'Skin-flint starves his labourers!
Clench-fist stows figs away, cheats government!
Such an one likes to kiss his neighbour's wife,
And beat his own; while such another . . . Boh!'
Soon came the broad day, circumstantial tale,
Dancing and verse, and there 's our Comedy,
There 's Mullos, there 's Euetes, there 's the stock
I shall be proud to graft my powers upon!
Protected? Punished quite as certainly
When Archons pleased to lay down each his law,—
Your Morucheides-Surakosios sort,—
Each season, 'No more naming citizens,
Only abuse the vice, the vicious spare!
Observe, henceforth no Areopagite
Demean his rank by writing Comedy!'
(Theyoneandallcouldwrite the'Clouds'ofcourse.)
'Needs must we nick expenditure, allow
Comedy half a choros, supper—none,
Times being hard, while applicants increase
For, what costs cash, the Tragic Trilogy.'
Lofty Tragedians! How they lounge aloof
Each with his Triad, three plays to my one,
Not counting the contemptuous fourth, the frank
Concession to mere mortal levity,
Satyric pittance tossed our beggar-world!
Your proud Euripides from first to last

Doled out some five such, never deigned us more!
And these—what curds and whey for marrowy wine!
That same Alkestis you so rave about
Passed muster with him for a Satyr-play,
The prig!—why trifle time with toys and skits
When he could stuff four ragbags sausage-wise
With sophistry, with bookish odds and ends,
Sokrates, meteors, moonshine, 'Life 's not Life,'
'The tongue swore, but unsworn the mind remains,'
And fifty such concoctions, crab-tree-fruit
Digested while, head low and heels in heaven,
He lay, let Comics laugh—for privilege!
Looked puzzled on, or pityingly off,
But never dreamed of paying gibe by jeer,
Buffet by blow: plenty of proverb-pokes
At vice and folly, wicked kings, mad mobs!
No sign of wincing at my Comic lash,
No protest against infamous abuse,
Malignant censure,—nought to prove I scourged
With tougher thong than leek-and-onion-plait!
If ever he glanced gloom, aggrieved at all,
The aggriever must be—Aischulos perhaps:
Or Sophokles he 'd take exception to.
—Do you detect in me—in me, I ask,
The man like to accept this measurement
Of faculty, contentedly sit classed
Mere Comic Poet—since I wrote 'The Birds'?"

I thought there might lurk truth in jest's disguise.

"Thanks!" he resumed, so quick to construe smile!
"I answered—in my mind—these gapers thus:
Since old wine's ripe and new verse raw, you judge—
What if I vary vintage-mode and mix
Blossom with must, give nosegay to the brew,
Fining, refining, gently, surely, till

The educated taste turns unawares
From customary dregs to draught divine?
Then answered—with my lips: More 'Wasps' you want?
Come next year and I give you 'Grasshoppers'!
And 'Grasshoppers' I gave them,—last month's play.
They formed the Choros. Alkibiades,
No longer Triphales but Trilophos,
(Whom I called Darling-of-the-Summertime,
Born to be nothing else but beautiful
And brave, to eat, drink, love his life away)
Persuades the Tettix (our Autochthon-brood,
That sip the dew and sing on olive-branch
Above the ant-and-emmet populace)
To summon all who meadow, hill and dale
Inhabit—bee, wasp, woodlouse, dragonfly—
To band themselves against red nipper-nose
Stagbeetle, huge Taügetan (you guess—
Sparté) Athenai needs must battle with,
Because her sons are grown effeminate
To that degree—so morbifies their flesh
The poison-drama of Euripides,
Morals and music—there 's no antidote
Occurs save warfare which inspirits blood,
And brings us back perchance the blessed time
When (Choros takes up tale) our commonalty
Firm in primæval virtue, antique faith,
Ere earwig-sophist plagued or pismire-sage,
Cockered no noddle up with A, b, g,
Book-learning, logic-chopping, and the moon,
But just employed their brains on '*Ruppapai*,
Row, boys, munch barley-bread, and take your ease—
Mindful, however, of the tier beneath!'
Ah, golden epoch! while the nobler sort

(Such needs must study, no contesting that !)
Wore no long curls but used to crop their hair,
Gathered the tunic well about the ham,
Remembering 't was soft sand they used for seat
At school-time, while—mark this—the lesson long,
No learner ever dared to cross his legs !
Then, if you bade him take the myrtle-bough
And sing for supper—'t was some grave romaunt
How man of Mitulené, wondrous wise,
Jumped into hedge, by mortals quickset called,
And there, anticipating Oidipous,
Scratched out his eyes and scratched them in again.
None of your Phaidras, Augés, Kanakés,
To mincing music, turn, trill, tweedle-trash,
Whence comes that Marathon is obsolete !
Next, my Antistrophé was—praise of Peace :
Ah, could our people know what Peace implies !
Home to the farm and furrow ! Grub one's vine,
Romp with one's Thratta, pretty serving-girl,
When wifie 's busy bathing ! Eat and drink,
And drink and eat, what else is good in life ?
Slice hare, toss pancake, gaily gurgle down
The Thasian grape in celebration due
Of Bacchos ! Welcome, dear domestic rite,
When wife and sons and daughters, Thratta too,
Pour peasoup as we chant delectably
In Bacchos reels, his tunic at his heels !
Enough, you comprehend,—I do at least !
Then,—be but patient,—the Parabasis !
Pray ! For in that I also pushed reform.
None of the self-laudation, vulgar brag,
Vainglorious rivals cultivate so much !
No ! If some merest word in Art's defence
Justice demanded of me,—never fear !
Claim was preferred, but dignifiedly.
A cricket asked a locust (winged, you know)

What he had seen most rare in foreign parts?
'I have flown far,' chirped he, 'North, East,
South, West,
And nowhere heard of poet worth a fig
If matched with Bald-head here, Aigina's boast,
Who in this play bids rivalry despair
Past, present, and to come, so marvellous
His Tragic, Comic, Lyric excellence!
Whereof the fit reward were (not to speak
Of dinner every day at public cost
I' the Prutaneion) supper with yourselves,
My Public, best dish offered bravest bard!'
No more! no sort of sin against good taste!
Then, satire,—Oh, a plain necessity!
But I won't tell you: for—could I dispense
With one more gird at old Ariphrades?
How scorpion-like he feeds on human flesh—
Ever finds out some novel infamy
Unutterable, inconceivable,
Which all the greater need was to describe
Minutely, each tail-twist at ink-shed time . . .
Now, what 's your gesture caused by? What
you loathe,
Don't I loathe doubly, else why take such pains
To tell it you? But keep your prejudice!
My audience justified you! Housebreakers!
This pattern-purity was played and failed
Last Rural Dionusia—failed! for why?
Ameipsias followed with the genuine stuff.
He had been mindful to engage the Four—
Karkinos and his dwarf-crab-family—
Father and sons, they whirled like spinning-tops,
Choros gigantically poked his fun,
The boys' frank laugh relaxed the seniors' brow,
The skies re-echoed victory's acclaim,
Ameipsias gained his due, I got my dose

Of wisdom for the future. Purity?
No more of that next month, Athenai mine!
Contrive new cut of robe who will,—I patch
The old exomis, add no purple sleeve!
The Thesmophoriazousai, smartened up
With certain plaits, shall please, I promise you!

"Yes, I took up the play that failed last year,
And re-arranged things; threw adroitly in,—
No Parachoregema,—men to match
My women there already; and when these
(I had a hit at Aristullos here,
His plan how womankind should rule the roast)
Drove men to plough—'A-field, ye cribbed of cape!'
Men showed themselves exempt from service straight
Stupendously, till all the boys cried 'Brave!'
Then for the elders, I bethought me too,
Improved upon Mnesilochos' release
From the old bowman, board and binding-strap:
I made his son-in-law Euripides
Engage to put both shrewish wives away—
'Gravity' one, the other 'Sophist-lore'—
And mate with the Bald Bard's hetairai twain—
'Goodhumour' and 'Indulgence': on they tripped,
Murrhiné, Akalanthis,—'beautiful
Their whole belongings'—crowd joined choros there!
And while the Toxotes wound up his part
By shower of nuts and sweetmeats on the mob,
The woman-choros celebrated New
Kalligeneia, the frank last-day rite.
Brief, I was chairéd and caressed and crowned
And the whole theatre broke out a-roar,
Echoed my admonition—choros-cap—

Rivals of mine, your hands to your faces!
Summon no more the Muses, the Graces,
Since here by my side they have chosen their places!
And so we all flocked merrily to feast,
I, my choragos, choros, actors, mutes
And flutes aforesaid, friends in crowd, no fear,
At the Priest's supper; and hilarity
Grew none the less that, early in the piece,
Ran a report, from row to row close-packed,
Of messenger's arrival at the Port
With weighty tidings, 'Of Lusandros' flight,'
Opined one; 'That Euboia penitent
Sends the Confederation fifty ships,'
Preferred another; while 'The Great King's Eye
Has brought a present for Elaphion here,
That rarest peacock Kompolakuthes!'
Such was the supposition of a third.
'No matter what the news,' friend Strattis laughed,
'It won't be worse for waiting: while each click
Of the klepsudra sets a-shaking grave
Resentment in our shark's-head, boiled and spoiled
By this time: dished in Sphettian vinegar,
Silphion and honey, served with cocks'-brain-sauce!
So, swift to supper, Poet! No mistake,
This play; nor, like the unflavoured "Grass-
hoppers,"
Salt without thyme!' Right merrily we supped,
Till—something happened.

"Out it shall, at last!

"Mirth drew to ending, for the cup was crowned
To the Triumphant! 'Kleonclapper erst,
Now, Plier of a scourge Euripides
Fairly turns tail from, flying Attiké
For Makedonia's rocks and frosts and bears,

Where, furry grown, he growls to match the squeak
Of girl-voiced, crocus-vested Agathon!
Ha ha, he he!' When suddenly a knock—
Sharp, solitary, cold, authoritative.

"'*Babaiax!* Sokrates a-passing by,
A-peering in for Aristullos' sake,
To put a question touching Comic Law?'

"No! Enters an old pale-swathed majesty,
Makes slow mute passage through two ranks as mute,
(Strattis stood up with all the rest, the sneak!)
Grey brow still bent on ground, upraised at length
When, our Priest reached, full-front the vision paused.

"'Priest!'—the deep tone succeeded the fixed gaze—
'Thou carest that thy god have spectacle
Decent and seemly; wherefore I announce
That, since Euripides is dead to-day,
My Choros, at the Greater Feast, next month,
Shall, clothed in black, appear ungarlanded!'

"Then the grey brow sank low, and Sophokles
Re-swathed him, sweeping doorward: mutely passed
'Twixt rows as mute, to mingle possibly
With certain gods who convoy age to port;
And night resumed him.

"When our stupor broke,
Chirpings took courage, and grew audible.

'Dead—so one speaks now of Euripides!
Ungarlanded dance Choros, did he say?
I guess the reason: in extreme old age

No doubt such have the gods for visitants.
Why did he dedicate to Herakles
An altar else, but that the god, turned Judge,
Told him in dream who took the crown of gold?
He who restored Akropolis the theft,
Himself may feel perhaps a timely twinge
At thought of certain other crowns he filched
From—who now visits Herakles the Judge.
Instance "Medeia"! that play yielded palm
To Sophokles; and he again—to whom?
Euphorion! Why? Ask Herakles the Judge!'

'Ungarlanded, just means—economy!
Suppress robes, chaplets, everything suppress
Except the poet's present! An old tale
Put capitally by Trugaios—eh?
—News from the world of transformation strange!
How Sophokles is grown Simonides,
And,—aged, rotten,—all the same, for greed
Would venture on a hurdle out to sea!—
So jokes Philonides. Kallistratos
Retorts—Mistake! Instead of stinginess,
The fact is, in extreme decrepitude,
He has discarded poet and turned priest,
Priest of Half-Hero Alkon: visited
In his own house too by Asklepios' self,
So he avers. Meanwhile, his own estate
Lies fallow; Iophon 's the manager,—
Nay, touches up a play, brings out the same,
Asserts true sonship. See to what you sink
After your dozen-dozen prodigies!
Looking so old—Euripides seems young,
Born ten years later.'

'Just his tricky style!
Since, stealing first away, he wins first word
Out of good-natured rival Sophokles,

Procures himself no bad panegyric.
Had fate willed otherwise, himself were taxed
To pay survivor's-tribute,—harder squeezed
From anybody beaten first to last,
Than one who, steadily a conqueror,
Finds that his magnanimity is tasked
To merely make pretence and—beat itself!'

"So chirped the feasters though suppressedly.

"But I—what else do you suppose?—had pierced
Quite through friends' outside-straining, foes' mock-praise,
And reached conviction hearted under all.
Death's rapid line had closed a life's account,
And cut off, left unalterably clear
The summed-up value of Euripides.

Well, it might be the Thasian! Certainly
There sang suggestive music in my ears;
And, through—what sophists style—the wall of sense
My eyes pierced: death seemed life and life seemed death,
Envisaged that way, now, which I, before,
Conceived was just a moonstruck mood. Quite plain
There re-insisted,—ay, each prim stiff phrase
Of each old play, my still-new laughing-stock,
Had meaning, well worth poet's pains to state,
Should life prove half true life's term,—death, the rest.
As for the other question, late so large
Now all at once so little,—he or I,
Which better comprehended playwright craft,—
There, too, old admonition took fresh point.

As clear recurred our last word-interchange
Two years since, when I tried with 'Ploutos.'
'Vain!'
Saluted me the cold grave-bearded bard—
'Vain, this late trial, Aristophanes!
None baulks the genius with impunity!
You know what kind 's the nobler, what makes grave
Or what makes grin; there 's yet a nobler still,
Possibly,—what makes wise, not grave,—and glad,
Not grinning: whereby laughter joins with tears,
Tragic and Comic Poet prove one power,
And Aristophanes becomes our Fourth—
Nay, greatest! Never needs the Art stand still,
But those Art leans on lag, and none like you,
Her strongest of supports, whose step aside
Undoes the march: defection checks advance
Too late adventured! See the "Ploutos" here!
This step decides your foot from old to new—
Proves you relinquish song and dance and jest,
Discard the beast, and, rising from all-fours,
Fain would paint, manlike, actual human life,
Make veritable men think, say and do.
Here 's the conception: which to execute,
Where 's force? Spent! Ere the race began, was breath
O' the runner squandered on each friendly fool—
Wit-fireworks fizzed off while day craved no flame:
How should the night receive her due of fire
Flared out in Wasps and Horses, Clouds and Birds,
Prodigiously a-crackle? Rest content!
The new adventure for the novel man
Born to that next success myself foresee
In right of where I reach before I rest.
At end of a long course, straight all the way,

Well may there tremble somewhat into ken
The untrod path, clouds veiled from earlier gaze!
None may live two lives: I have lived mine through,
Die where I first stand still. You retrograde.
I leave my life's work. *I* compete with you,
My last with your last, my Antiope—
Phoinissai—with this Ploutos? No, I think!
Ever shall great and awful Victory
Accompany my life—in Maketis
If not Athenai. Take my farewell, friend!
Friend,—for from no consummate excellence
Like yours, whatever fault may countervail,
Do I profess estrangement: murk the marsh,
Yet where a solitary marble block
Blanches the gloom, there let the eagle perch!
You show—what splinters of Pentelikos,
Islanded by what ordure! Eagles fly,
Rest on the right place, thence depart as free;
But 'ware man's footstep, would it traverse mire
Untainted! Mire is safe for worms that crawl.'

"Balaustion! Here are very many words,
All to portray one moment's rush of thought,—
And much they do it! Still, you understand.
The Archon, the Feast-master, read their sum
And substance, judged the banquet-glow extinct,
So rose, discreetly if abruptly, crowned
The parting cup,—'To the Good Genius, then!'

"Up starts young Strattis for a final flash:
'Ay, the Good Genius! To the Comic Muse,
She who evolves superiority,
Triumph and joy from sorrow, unsuccess
And all that 's incomplete in human life;
Who proves such actual failure transient wrong,
Since out of body uncouth, halt and maimed—

Since out of soul grotesque, corrupt or blank—
Fancy, uplifted by the Muse, can flit
To soul and body, re-instate them Man :
Beside which perfect man, how clear we see
Divergency from type was earth's effect !
Escaping whence by laughter,—Fancy's feat,—
We right man's wrong, establish true for false,—
Above misshapen body, uncouth soul,
Reach the fine form, the clear intelligence—
Above unseemliness, reach decent law,—
By laughter : attestation of the Muse
That low-and-ugsome is not signed and sealed
Incontrovertibly man's portion here,
Or, if here,—why, still high-and-fair exists
In that ethereal realm where laughs our soul
Lift by the Muse. Hail thou her ministrant !
Hail who accepted no deformity
In man as normal and remediless,
But rather pushed it to such gross extreme
That, outraged, we protest by eye's recoil
The opposite proves somewhere rule and law !
Hail who implied, by limning Lamachos,
Plenty and pastime wait on peace, not war !
Philokleon—better bear a wrong than plead,
Play the litigious fool to stuff the mouth
Of dikast with the due three-obol fee !
The Paphlagonian—stick to the old sway
Of few and wise, not rabble-government !
Trugaios, Pisthetairos, Strepsiades,—
Why multiply examples ? Hail, in fine,
The hero of each painted monster—so
Suggesting the unpictured perfect shape !
Pour out ! A laugh to Aristophanes ! '

"Stay, my fine Strattis"—and I stopped applause—
"To the Good Genius—but the Tragic Muse !

She who instructs her poet, bids man's soul
Play man's part merely nor attempt the gods'
Ill-guessed of! Task humanity to height,
Put passion to prime use, urge will, unshamed
When will's last effort breaks in impotence!
No power forego, elude: no weakness,—plied
Fairly by power and will,—renounce, deny!
Acknowledge, in such miscalled weakness strength
Latent: and substitute thus things for words!
Make man run life's race fairly,—legs and feet,
Craving no false wings to o'erfly its length!
Trust on, trust ever, trust to end—in truth!
By truth of extreme passion, utmost will,
Shame back all false display of either force—
Barrier about such strenuous heat and glow,
That cowardice shall shirk contending,—cant,
Pretension, shrivel at truth's first approach!
Pour to the Tragic Muse's ministrant
Who, as he pictured pure Hippolutos,
Abolished our earth's blot Ariphrades;
Who, as he drew Bellerophon the bold,
Proclaimed Kleonumos incredible;
Who, as his Theseus towered up man once more,
Made Alkibiades shrink boy again!
A tear—no woman's tribute, weak exchange
For action, water spent and heart's-blood saved—
No man's regret for greatness gone, ungraced
Perchance by even that poor meed, man's praise—
But some god's superabundance of desire,
Yearning of will to 'scape necessity,—
Love's overbrimming for self-sacrifice,
Whence good might be, which never else may be,
By power displayed, forbidden this strait sphere,—
Effort expressible one only way
Such tear from me fall to Euripides!"

The Thasian !—All, the Thasian, I account !
Whereupon outburst the whole company
Into applause and—laughter, would you think ?
"The unrivalled one ! How, never at a loss,
He turns the Tragic on its Comic side
Else imperceptible ! Here 's death itself—
Death of a rival, of an enemy,—
Scarce seen as Comic till the master-touch
Made it acknowledge Aristophanes !
Lo, that Euripidean laurel-tree
Struck to the heart by lightning ! Sokrates
Would question us, with buzz of how and why,
Wherefore the berry's virtue, the bloom's vice,
Till we all wished him quiet with his friend ;
Agathon would compose an elegy,
Lyric bewailment fit to move a stone,
And, stones responsive, we might wince, 't is like ;
Nay, with most cause of all to weep the least,
Sophokles ordains mourning for his sake
While we confess to a remorseful twinge :—
Suddenly, who but Aristophanes,
Prompt to the rescue, puts forth solemn hand,
Singles us out the tragic tree's best branch,
Persuades it groundward and, at tip, appends,
For votive-visor, Faun's goat-grinning face !
Back it flies, evermore with jest a-top,
And we recover the true mood, and laugh !"

"I felt as when some Nikias,—ninny-like
Troubled by sunspot-portent, moon-eclipse,—
At fault a little, sees no choice but sound
Retreat from foeman ; and his troops mistake
The signal, and hail onset in the blast,
And at their joyous answer, *alalé*,
Back the old courage brings the scattered wits ;
He wonders what his doubt meant, quick confirms

The happy error, blows the charge amain.
So I repaired things.

"Both be praised" thanked I.
"You who have laughed with Aristophanes,
You who wept rather with the Lord of Tears!
Priest, do thou, president alike o'er each,
Tragic and Comic function of the god,
Help with libation to the blended twain!
Either of which who serving, only serves—
Proclaims himself disqualified to pour
To that Good Genius—complex Poetry,
Uniting each god-grace, including both:
Which, operant for body as for soul,
Masters alike the laughter and the tears,
Supreme in lowliest earth, sublimest sky.
Who dares disjoin these,—whether he ignores
Body or soul, whichever half destroys,—
Maims the else perfect manhood, perpetrates
Again the inexpiable crime we curse—
Hacks at the Hermai, halves each guardian shape
Combining, nowise vainly, prominence
Of august head and enthroned intellect,
With homelier symbol of asserted sense,—
Nature's prime impulse, earthly appetite.
For, when our folly ventures on the freak,
Would fain abolish joy and fruitfulness,
Mutilate nature—what avails the Head
Left solitarily predominant,—
Unbodied soul,—not Hermes, both in one?
I, no more than our City, acquiesce
In such a desecration, but defend
Man's double nature—ay, wert thou its foe!
Could I once more, thou cold Euripides,
Encounter thee, in nought would I abate
My warfare, nor subdue my worst attack

On thee whose life-work preached 'Raise soul,
sink sense!
Evirate Hermes!'—would avenge the god,
And justify myself. Once face to face,
Thou, the argute and tricksy, shouldst not wrap,
As thine old fashion was, in silent scorn
The breast that quickened at the sting of truth,
Nor turn from me, as, if the tale be true,
From Lais when she met thee in thy walks,
And questioned why she had no rights as thou:
Not so shouldst thou betake thee, be assured,
To book and pencil, deign me no reply!
I would extract an answer from those lips
So closed and cold, were mine the garden-chance!
Gone from the world! Does none remain to take
Thy part and ply me with thy sophist-skill?
No sun makes proof of his whole potency
For gold and purple in that orb we view:
The apparent orb does little but leave blind
The audacious, and confused the worshipping;
But, close on orb's departure, must succeed
The serviceable cloud,—must intervene.
Induce expenditure of rose and blue,
Reveal what lay in him was lost to us.
So, friends, what hinders, as we homeward go,
If, privileged by triumph gained to-day,
We clasp that cloud our sun left saturate,
The Rhodian rosy with Euripides?
Not of my audience on my triumph-day,
She nor her husband! After the night's news
Neither will sleep but watch; I know the mood.
Accompany! my crown declares my right!
And here you stand with those warm golden eyes!

"In honest language, I am scarce too sure
Whether I really felt, indeed expressed

Then, in that presence, things I now repeat:
Nor half, nor any one word,—will that do?
May be, such eyes must strike conviction, turn
One's nature bottom upwards, show the base—
The live rock latent under wave and foam:
Superimposure these! Yet solid stuff
Will ever and anon, obeying star,
(And what star reaches rock-nerve like an eye?)
Swim up to surface, spout or mud or flame,
And find no more to do than sink as fast.

"Anyhow, I have followed happily
The impulse, pledged my Genius with effect,
Since, come to see you, I am shown—myself!"

I answered:

"One of us declared for both
'Welcome the glory of Aristophanes.'
The other adds: and,—if that glory last,
Nor marsh-born vapour creep to veil the same,—
Once entered, share in our solemnity!
Commemorate, as we, Euripides!"

"What?" he looked round, "I darken the bright house?
Profane the temple of your deity?
That 's true! Else wherefore does he stand portrayed?
What Rhodian paint and pencil saved so much,
Beard, freckled face, brow—all but breath, I hope!
Come, that 's unfair: myself am somebody,
Yet my pictorial fame 's just potter's-work,—
I merely figure on men's drinking-mugs!
I and the Flat-nose, Sophroniskos' son,
Oft make a pair. But what 's this lies below?

His table-book and graver, playwright's tool!
And lo, the sweet psalterion, strung and screwed,
Whereon he tried those *le-é-é-é-és*
And *ke-é-é-é-és* and turns and trills,
Lovely lark's tirra-lirra, lad's delight!
Aischulos' bronze-throat eagle-bark at blood
Has somehow spoiled my taste for twitterings!
With . . . what, and did he leave you 'Herakles'?
The 'Frenzied Hero,' one unfractured sheet,
No pine-wood tablets smeared with treacherous wax—
Papuros perfect as e'er tempted pen!
This sacred twist of bay-leaves dead and sere
Must be that crown the fine work failed to catch,—
No wonder! This might crown 'Antiope.'
'Herakles' triumph? In your heart perhaps!
But elsewhere? Come now, I 'll explain the case,
Show you the main mistake. Give me the sheet!"

I interrupted:

"Aristophanes!
The stranger-woman sues in her abode—
'Be honoured as our guest!' But, call it—shrine,
Then 'No dishonour to the Daimon!' bids
The priestess 'or expect dishonour's due!'
You enter fresh from your worst infamy,
Last instance of long outrage; yet I pause,
Withhold the word a-tremble on my lip,
Incline me, rather, yearn to reverence,—
So you but suffer that I see the blaze
And not the bolt,—the splendid fancy-fling,
Not the cold iron malice, the launched lie
Whence heavenly fire has withered; impotent,
Yet execrable, leave it 'neath the look
Of yon impassive presence! What he scorned,

His life long, need I touch, offend my foot,
To prove that malice missed its mark, that lie
Cumbers the ground, returns to whence it came?
I marvel, I deplore,—the rest be mute!
But, throw off hate's celestiality,—
Show me, apart from song-flash and wit-flame,
A mere man's hand ignobly clenched against
Yon supreme calmness,—and I interpose,
Such as you see me! Silk breaks lightning's blow!"

He seemed to scarce so much as notice me,
Aught had I spoken, save the final phrase:
Arrested there.

"Euripides grown calm!
Calmness supreme means dead and therefore safe,"
He muttered; then more audibly began—

"Dead! Such must die! Could people comprehend!
There 's the unfairness of it! So obtuse
Are all: from Solon downward with his saw
'Let none revile the dead,—no, though the son,
Nay, far descendant, should revile thyself!'—
To him who made Elektra, in the act
Of wreaking vengeance on her worst of foes,
Scruple to blame, since speech that blames insults
Too much the very villain life-released.
Now, *I* say, only after death, begins
That formidable claim,—immunity
Of faultiness from fault's due punishment!
The living, who defame me,—why, they live:
Fools,—I best prove them foolish by their life,
Will they but work on, lay their work by mine,
And wait a little, one Olympiad, say!
Then—where 's the vital force, mine froze beside?

The sturdy fibre, shamed my brittle stuff?
The school-correctness, sure of wise award
When my vagaries cease to tickle taste?
Where 's censure that must sink me, judgment big
Awaiting just the word posterity
Pants to pronounce? Time's wave breaks, buries
—*whom*,
Fools, when myself confronts you four years hence?
But die, ere next Lenaia,—safely so
You 'scape me, slink with all your ignorance,
Stupidity and malice, to that hole
O'er which survivors croak 'Respect the dead!'
Ay, for I needs must! But allow me clutch
Only a carrion-handful, lend it sense,
(Mine, not its own, or could it answer me?)
And question 'You, I pluck from hiding-place,
Whose cant was, certain years ago, my 'Clouds'
Might last until the swallows came with Spring—
Whose chatter, 'Birds' are unintelligible,
Mere psychologic puzzling: poetry?
List, the true lay to rock a cradle with!
O man of Mitulené, wondrous wise!'
—Would not I rub each face in its own filth
To tune of 'Now that years have come and gone,
How does the fact stand? What 's demonstrable
By time, that tries things?—your own test, not mine
Who think men are, were, ever will be fools,
Though somehow fools confute fools,—as these,
you!
Don't mumble to the sheepish twos and threes
You cornered and called 'audience'! Face this *me*
Who know, and can, and—helped by fifty years—
Do pulverize you pygmies, then as now!'

"Ay, now as then, I pulverize the brood,
Balaustion! Mindful, from the first, where foe

Would hide head safe when hand had flung its stone,
I did not turn cheek and take pleasantry,
But flogged while skin could purple and flesh start,
To teach fools whom they tried conclusions with.
First face a-splutter at me got such splotch
Of prompt slab mud as, filling mouth to maw,
Made its concern thenceforward not so much
To criticize me as go cleanse itself.
The only drawback to which huge delight,—
(He saw it, how he saw it, that calm cold
Sagacity you call Euripides !)
—Why, 't is that, make a muckheap of a man,
There, pillared by your prowess, he remains,
Immortally immerded. Not so he !
Men pelted him but got no pellet back.
He reasoned, I 'll engage,—'Acquaint the world
Certain minuteness butted at my knee ?
Dogface Eruxis, the small satirist,—
What better would the manikin desire
Than to strut forth on tiptoe, notable
As who, so far up, fouled me in the flank ?'
So dealt he with the dwarfs : we giants, too,
Why must we emulate their pin-point play ?
Render imperishable—impotence,
For mud throw mountains ? Zeus, by mud unreached,—
Well, 't was no dwarf he heaved Olumpos at !"

My heart burned up within me to my tongue.

"And why must men remember, ages hence,
Who it was rolled down rocks, but refuse too—
Strattis might steal from ! mixture-monument,
Recording what ? 'I, Aristophanes,

Who boast me much inventive in my art,
Against Euripides thus volleyed muck
Because, in art, he too extended bounds.
I—patriot, loving peace and hating war,—
Choosing the rule of few, but wise and good,
Rather than mob-dictature, fools and knaves
However multiplied their mastery,—
Despising most of all the demagogue,
(Noisome air-bubble, buoyed up, borne along
By kindred breath of knave and fool below,
Whose hearts swell proudly as each puffing face
Grows big, reflected in that glassy ball,
Vacuity, just bellied out to break
And righteously bespatter friends the first)—
I loathing,—beyond less puissant speech
Than my own god-grand language to declare,—
The fawning, cozenage and calumny
Wherewith such favourite feeds the populace
That fan and set him flying for reward :—
I who, detecting what vice underlies
Thought's superstructure,—fancy's sludge and slime
'Twixt fact's sound floor and thought's mere surface-growth
Of hopes and fears which root no deeplier down
Than where all such mere fungi breed and bloat—
Namely, man's misconception of the God :—
I, loving, hating, wishful from my soul
That truth should triumph, falsehood have defeat,
—Why, all my soul's supremacy of power
Did I pour out in volley just on him
Who, his whole life long, championed every cause
I called my heart's cause, loving as I loved,
Hating my hates, spurned falsehood, championed truth,—
Championed truth not by flagellating foe

With simple rose and lily, gibe and jeer,
Sly wink of boon-companion o'er his bowze
Who, while he blames the liquor, smacks the lip,
Blames, doubtless, but leers condonation too,—
No, the balled fist broke brow like thunderbolt,
Battered till brain flew! Seeing which descent,
None questioned that was first acquaintanceship,
The avenger's with the vice he crashed through bone.
Still, he displeased me; and I turned from foe
To fellow-fighter, flung much stone, more mud,—
But missed him, since he lives aloof, I see.'
Pah! stop more shame, deep-cutting glory through,
Nor add, this poet, learned,—found no taunt
Tell like 'That other poet studies books!'
Wise,—cried 'At each attempt to move our hearts,
He uses the mere phrase of daily life!'
Witty,—'His mother was a herb-woman!'
Veracious, honest, loyal, fair and good,—
'It was Kephisophon who helped him write!'

"Whence,—O the tragic end of comedy!—
Balaustion pities Aristophanes.
For, who believed him? Those who laughed so loud?
They heard him call the sun Sicilian cheese!
Had he called true cheese—curd, would muscle move?
What made them laugh but the enormous lie?
'Kephisophon wrote Herakles? ha, ha,
What can have stirred the wine-dregs, soured the soul
And set a-lying Aristophanes?
Some accident at which he took offence!
The Tragic Master in a moody muse

Passed him unhailing, and it hurts—it hurts!
Beside, there 's licence for the Wine-lees-song!' "
Blood burnt the cheek-bone, each black eye
flashed fierce.

"But this exceeds our licence! Stay awhile—
That 's the solution! both are foreigners,
The fresh-come Rhodian lady and her spouse
The man of Phokis: newly resident,
Nowise instructed—that explains it all!
No born and bred Athenian but would smile,
Unless frown seemed more fit for ignorance.
These strangers have a privilege!

"You blame"
(Presently he resumed with milder mien)
"Both theory and practice—Comedy:
Blame her from altitudes the Tragic friend
Rose to, and upraised friends along with him,
No matter how. Once there, all 's cold and fine,
Passionless, rational; our world beneath
Shows (should you condescend to grace so much
As glance at poor Athenai) grimly gross—
A population which, mere flesh and blood,
Eats, drinks and kisses, falls to fisticuffs,
Then hugs as hugely: speaks too as it acts,
Prodigiously talks nonsense,—townsmen needs
Must parley in their town's vernacular.
Such world has, of two courses, one to choose:
Unworld itself,—or else go blackening off
To its crow-kindred, leave philosophy
Her heights serene, fit perch for owls like you.
Now, since the world demurs to either course,
Permit me,—in default of boy or girl,
So they be reared Athenian, good and true,—

To praise what you most blame! Hear Art's defence!
I 'll prove our institution, Comedy,
Coëval with the birth of freedom, matched
So nice with our Republic, that its growth
Measures each greatness, just as its decline
Would signalize the downfall of the pair.
Our Art began when Bacchos . . . never mind!
You and your master don't acknowledge gods:
'They are not, no, they are not!' well,—began
When the rude instinct of our race outspoke,
Found,—on recurrence of festivity
Occasioned by black mother-earth's good will
To children, as they took her vintage-gifts,—
Found—not the least of many benefits—
That wine unlocked the stiffest lip, and loosed
The tongue late dry and reticent of joke,
Through custom's gripe which gladness thrusts aside.
So, emulating liberalities,
Heaven joined with earth for that god's day at least,
Renewed man's privilege, grown obsolete,
Of telling truth nor dreading punishment.
Whereon the joyous band disguised their forms
With skins, beast-fashion, daubed each phyz with dregs,
Then hollaed 'Neighbour, you are fool, you—knave,
You—hard to serve, you—stingy to reward!'
The guiltless crowed, the guilty sunk their crest,
And good folk gained thereby, 't was evident.
Whence, by degrees, a birth of happier thought,
The notion came—not simply this to say,
But this to do—prove, put in evidence,
And act the fool, the knave, the harsh, the hunks,

Who *did* prate, cheat, shake fist, draw purse-string
tight,
As crowd might see, which only heard before.

"So played the Poet, with his man of parts ;
And all the others, found unqualified
To mount cart and be persons, made the mob,
Joined choros, fortified their fellows' fun,
Anticipated the community,
Gave judgment which the public ratified.
Suiting rough weapon doubtless to plain truth,
They flung, for word-artillery, why—filth ;
Still, folk who wiped the unsavoury salute
From visage, would prefer the mess to wit—
Steel, poked through midriff with a civil speech,
As now the way is : then, the kindlier mode
Was—drub not stab, ribroast not scarify !
So did Sousarion introduce, and so
Did I, acceding, find the Comic Art :
Club,—if I call it,—notice what 's implied !
An engine proper for rough chastisement,
No downright slaying : with impunity—
Provided crabtree, steeped in oily joke,
Deal only such a bruise as laughter cures.
I kept the gained advantage : stickled still
For club-law—stout fun and allowanced thumps :
Knocked in each knob a crevice to hold joke
As fig-leaf holds the fat-fry.

"Next, whom thrash ?
Only the coarse fool and the clownish knave ?
Higher, more artificial, composite
Offence should prove my prowess, eye and arm !
Not who robs henroost, tells of untaxed figs,
Spends all his substance on stewed ellops-fish,
Or gives a pheasant to his neighbour's wife :

No! strike malpractice that affects the State,
The common weal—intriguer or poltroon,
Venality, corruption, what care I
If shrewd or witless merely?—so the thing
Lay sap to aught that made Athenai bright
And happy, change her customs, lead astray
Youth or age, play the demagogue at Pnux,
The sophist in Palaistra, or—what 's worst,
As widest mischief,—from the Theatre
Preach innovation, bring contempt on oaths,
Adorn licentiousness, despise the Cult.
Are such to be my game? Why, then there wants
Quite other cunning than a cudgel-sweep!
Grasp the old stout stock, but new tip with steel
Each boss, if I would bray—no callous hide
Simply, but Lamachos in coat of proof,
Or Kleon cased about with impudence!
Shaft pushed no worse while point pierced spark-
ling so
That none smiled 'Sportive, what seems savagest,
—Innocuous anger, spiteless rustic mirth!'
Yet spiteless in a sort, considered well,
Since I pursued my warfare till each wound
Went through the mere man, reached the principle
Worth purging from Athenai. Lamachos?
No, I attacked war's representative;
Kleon? No, flattery of the populace;
Sokrates? No, but that pernicious seed
Of sophists whereby hopeful youth is taught
To jabber argument, chop logic, pore
On sun and moon, and worship Whirligig.
O your tragedian, with the lofty grace,
Aims at no other and effects as much?
Candidly: what 's a polished period worth,
Filed curt sententiousness of loaded line,
When he who deals out doctrine, primly steps

From just that selfsame moon he maunders of,
And, blood-thinned by his pallid nutriment,
Proposes to rich earth-blood—purity?
In me, 't was equal-balanced flesh rebuked
Excess alike in stuff-guts Glauketes
Or starveling Chairephon; I challenged both,—
Strong understander of our common life,
I urged sustainment of humanity.
Whereas when your tragedian cries up Peace—
He 's silent as to cheesecakes Peace may chew;
Seeing through rabble-rule, he shuts his eye
To what were better done than crowding Pnux—
That's—dance '*Threttanelo*, the Kuklops drunk!'
"My power has hardly need to vaunt itself!
Opposers peep and mutter, or speak plain:
'No naming names in Comedy!' votes one,
'Nor vilifying live folk!' legislates
Another, 'urge amendment on the dead!'
'Don t throw away hard cash,' supplies a third,
'But crib from actor's dresses, choros-treats!'
Then Kleon did his best to bully me:
Called me before the Law Court: 'Such a play
Satirized citizens with strangers there,
Such other,'—why, its fault was in myself!
I was, this time, the stranger, privileged
To act no play at all,—Egyptian, I—
Rhodian or Kameirensian, Aiginete,
Lindian, or any foreigner he liked—
Because I can't write Attic, probably!
Go ask my rivals,—how they roughed my fleece,
And how, shorn pink themselves, the huddled sheep
Shiver at distance from the snapping shears!
Why must they needs provoke me?
"All the same,
No matter for my triumph, I foretell

Subsidence of the day-star : quench his beams ?
No Aias e'er was equal to the feat
By throw of shield, tough-hided seven times seven,
'Twixt sky and earth ! 't is dullards soft and sure
Who breathe against his brightest, here a sigh
And there a 'So let be, we pardon you !'
Till the minute mist hangs a block, has tamed
Noonblaze to 'twilight mild and equable,'
Vote the old women spinning out of doors.
Give me the earth-spasm, when the lion ramped
And the bull gendered in the brave gold flare !
O you shall have amusement,—better still,
Instruction ! no more horse-play, naming names,
Taxing the fancy when plain sense will serve !
Thearion, now, my friend who bakes you bread,
What 's worthier limning than his household life ?
His whims and ways, his quarrels with the spouse,
And how the son, instead of learning knead
Kilikian loaves, brings heart-break on his sire
By buying horseflesh branded *San*, each flank,
From shrewd Menippos who imports the ware :
While pretty daughter Kepphé too much haunts
The shop of Sporgilos the barber ! brave !
Out with Thearion's meal-tub politics
In lieu of Pisthetairos, Strepsiades !
That 's your exchange ? O Muse of Megara !
Advise the fools '*Feed babe on weasel-lap*
For wild-boar's marrow, Cheiron's hero-pap,
And rear, for man—Ariphrades, mayhap !'
Yes, my Balaustion, yes, my Euthukles,
That 's *your* exchange,—who, foreigners in fact
And fancy, would impose your squeamishness
On sturdy health, and substitute such brat
For the right offspring of us Rocky Ones,
Because babe kicks the cradle,—crows, not mewls!

"Which brings me to the prime fault, poison-speck
Whence all the plague springs—that first feud of all
'Twixt me and you and your Euripides.
'Unworld the world' frowns he, my opposite.
I cry, 'Life!' 'Death,' he groans, 'our better Life!'
Despise what is—the good and graspable,
Prefer the out of sight and in at mind,
To village-joy, the well-side violet-patch,
The jolly club-feast when our field 's in soak,
Roast thrushes, hare-soup, pea-soup, deep washed down
With Peparethian; the prompt paying off
That black-eyed brown-skinned country-flavoured wench
We caught among our brushwood foraging:
On these look fig-juice, curdle up life's cream,
And fall to magnifying misery!
Or, if you condescend to happiness,
Why, talk, talk, talk about the empty name
While thing's self lies neglected 'neath your nose!
I need particular discourtesy
And private insult from Euripides
To render contest with him credible?
Say, all of me is outraged! one stretched sense,
I represent the whole Republic,—gods,
Heroes, priests, legislators, poets,—prone,
And pummelled into insignificance,
If will in him were matched with power of stroke.
For see what he has changed or hoped to change!
How few years since, when he began the fight,
Did there beat life indeed Athenai through!
Plenty and peace, then! Hellas thundersmote
The Persian. He himself had birth, you say,
That morn salvation broke at Salamis,
And heroes still walked earth. Themistokles—

Surely his mere back-stretch of hand could still
Find, not so lost in dark, Odusseus?—he
Holding as surely on to Herakles,—
Who touched Zeus, link by link, the unruptured chain!
Were poets absent? Aischulos might hail—
With Pindaros, Theognis,—whom for sire?
Homeros' self, departed yesterday!
While Hellas, saved and sung to, then and thus,—
Ah, people,—ah, lost antique liberty!
We lived, ourselves, undoubted lords of earth:
Wherever olives flourish, corn yields crop
To constitute our title—ours such land!
Outside of oil and breadstuff,—barbarism!
What need of conquest? Let barbarians starve!
Devote our whole strength to our sole defence,
Content with peerless native products, home,
Beauty profuse in earth's mere sights and sounds,
Such men, such women, and such gods their guard!
The gods? he worshipped best who feared them most,
And left their nature uninquired into,
—Nature? their very names! pay reverence,
Do sacrifice for our part, theirs would be
To prove benignantest of playfellows.
With kindly humanism they countenanced
Our emulation of divine escapes
Through sense and soul: soul, sense are made to use;
Use each, acknowledging its god the while!
Crush grape, dance, drink, indulge, for Bacchos' sake!
'T is Aphrodité's feast-day—frisk and fling,
Provided we observe our oaths, and house
Duly the stranger: Zeus takes umbrage else!
Ah, the great time—had I been there to taste!

Perikles, right Olumpian,—occupied
As yet with getting an Olumpos reared
Marble and gold above Akropolis,—
Wisely so spends what thrifty fools amassed
For cut-throat projects. Who carves Promachos?
Who writes the Oresteia?
"Ah, the time!
For, all at once, a cloud has blanched the blue,
A cold wind creeps through the close vineyard-rank,
The olive-leaves curl, violets crisp and close
Like a nymph's wrinkling at the bath's first splash
On breast. (Your pardon!) There 's a restless change,
Deterioration. Larks and nightingales
Are silenced, here and there a gor-crow grim
Flaps past, as scenting opportunity.
Where Kimon passaged to the Boulé once,
A starveling crew, unkempt, unshorn, unwashed,
Occupy altar-base and temple-step,
Are minded to indoctrinate our youth!
How call these carrion kill-joys that intrude?
'Wise men,' their nomenclature! Prodikos—
Who scarce could, unassisted, pick his steps
From way Theseia to the Tripods' way,—
This empty noddle comprehends the sun,—
How he 's Aigina's bigness, wheels no whit
His way from east to west, nor wants a steed!
And here 's Protagoras sets wrongheads right,
Explains what virtue, vice, truth, falsehood mean,
Makes all we seemed to know prove ignorance
Yet knowledge also, since, on either side
Of any question, something is to say,
Nothing to 'stablish, all things to disturb!
And shall youth go and play at kottabos,
Leaving unsettled whether moon-spots breed?
Or dare keep Choes ere the problem 's solved—

Why should I like my wife who dislikes me?
'But sure the gods permit this, censure that?'
So tell them! straight the answer 's in your teeth:
'You relegate these points, then, to the gods?
What and where are they?' What my sire supposed,
And where yon cloud conceals them! 'Till they 'scape
And scramble down to Leda, as a swan,
Europa, as a bull! why not as—ass
To somebody? Your sire was Zeus perhaps!
Either—away with such ineptitude!
Or, wanting energy to break your bonds,
Stick to the good old stories, think the rain
Is—Zeus distilling pickle through a sieve!
Think thunder 's thrown to break Theoros' head
For breaking oaths first! Meanwhile let ourselves
Instruct your progeny you prate like fools
Of father Zeus, who 's but the atmosphere,
Brother Poseidon, otherwise called—sea,
And son Hephaistos—fire and nothing else!
Over which nothings there 's a something still,
"Necessity," that rules the universe
And cares as much about your Choes-feast
Performed or intermitted, as you care
Whether gnats sound their trump from head or tail!'
When, stupefied at such philosophy,
We cry—Arrest the madmen, governor!
Pound hemlock and pour bull's-blood, Perikles!—
Would you believe? The Olumpian bends his brow,
Scarce pauses from his building! 'Say they thus?
Then, they say wisely. Anaxagoras,
I had not known how simple proves eclipse
But for thy teaching! Go, fools, learn like me!'

"Well, Zeus nods: man must reconcile himself,
So, let the Charon's-company harangue,
And Anaxagoras be—as we wish!
A comfort is in nature: while grass grows
And water runs, and sesame pricks tongue,
And honey from Brilesian hollow melts
On mouth, and Bacchis' flavorous lip beats both,
You will not be untaught life's use, young man?
Pho! My young man just proves that pannieredass
Said to have borne Youth strapped on his stout back,
With whom a serpent bargained, bade him swap
The priceless boon for—water to quench thirst!
What's youth to my young man? In love with age,
He Spartanizes, argues, fasts and frowns,
Denies the plainest rules of life, long since
Proved sound; sets all authority aside,
Must simply recommence things, learn ere act,
And think out thoroughly how youth should pass—
Just as if youth stops passing, all the same!

"One last resource is left us—poetry!
Vindicate nature, prove Plataian help,
Turn out, a thousand strong, all right and tight,
To save Sense, poet! Bang the sophist-brood
Would cheat man out of wholesome sustenance
By swearing wine is water, honey—gall,
Saperdion—the Empousa! Panic-smit,
Our juveniles abstain from Sense and starve:
Be yours to disenchant them! Change things back!
Or better, strain a point the other way
And handsomely exaggerate wronged truth!
Lend wine a glory never gained from grape,
Help honey with a snatch of him we style
The Muses' Bee, bay-bloom-fed Sophokles,
And give Saperdion a Kimberic robe!

"'I, his successor,' gruff the answer grunts,
'Incline to poetize philosophy,
Extend it rather than restrain; as thus—
Are heroes men? No more, and scarce as much,
Shall mine be represented. Are men poor?
Behold them ragged, sick, lame, halt and blind!
Do they use speech? Ay, street-terms, market-phrase!
Having thus drawn sky earthwards, what comes next
But dare the opposite, lift earth to sky?
Mere puppets once, I now make womankind,
For thinking, saying, doing, match the male.
Lift earth? I drop to, dally with, earth's dung!
—Recognize in the very slave—man's mate,
Declare him brave and honest, kind and true,
And reasonable as his lord, in brief.
I paint men as they are—so runs my boast—
Not as they should be: paint—what 's part of man
—Women and slaves—not as, to please your pride,
They should be, but your equals, as they are.
O and the Gods! Instead of abject mien,
Submissive whisper, while my Choros cants
"Zeus,—with thy cubit's length of attributes,—
May I, the ephemeral, ne'er scrutinize
Who made the heaven and earth and all things there!"
Myself shall say' . . . Ay, Herakles may help!
Give me,—I want the very words,—attend!"

He read. Then "Murder 's out,—'There are no Gods.'
Man has no master, owns, by consequence,
No right, no wrong, except to please or plague
His nature: what man likes be man's sole law!
Still, since he likes Saperdion, honey, figs,
Man may reach freedom by your roundabout.

'Never believe yourselves the freer thence!
There are no gods, but there 's "Necessity,"—
Duty enjoined you, fact in figment's place,
Throned on no mountain, native to the mind!
Therefore deny yourselves Saperdion, figs
And honey, for the sake of—what I dream,
A-sitting with my legs up!'

"Infamy!
The poet casts in calm his lot with these
Assailants of Apollon! Sworn to serve
Each Grace, the Furies call him minister—
He, who was born for just that roseate world
Renounced so madly, where what 's false is fact,
Where he makes beauty out of ugliness,
Where he lives, life itself disguised for him
As immortality—so works the spell,
The enthusiastic mood which marks a man
Muse-mad, dream-drunken, wrapt around by verse,
Encircled with poetic atmosphere,
As lark emballed by its own crystal song,
Or rose enmisted by that scent it makes!
No, this were unreality! the real
He wants, not falsehood,—truth alone he seeks,
Truth, for all beauty! Beauty, in all truth—
That 's certain somehow! Must the eagle lilt
Lark-like, needs fir-tree blossom rose-like? No!
Strength and utility charm more than grace,
And what 's most ugly proves most beautiful.
So much assistance from Euripides!

"Whereupon I betake me, since needs must,
To a concluding—'Go and feed the crows!'
Do! Spoil your art as you renounce your life,
Poetize your so precious system, do,
Degrade the hero, nullify the god,

Exhibit women, slaves and men as peers,—
Your castigation follows prompt enough !
When all 's concocted upstairs, heels o'er head,
Down must submissive drop the masterpiece
For public praise or blame : so, praise away,
Friend Sokrates, wife's-friend Kephisophon !
Boast innovations, cramp phrase, uncouth song,
Hard matter and harsh manner, gods, men, slaves
And women jumbled to a laughing-stock
Which Hellas shall hold sides at lest she split !
Hellas, on these, shall have her word to say !

"She has it and she says it—there 's the curse!—
She finds he makes the shag-rag hero-race,
The noble slaves, wise women, move as much
Pity and terror as true tragic types :
Applauds inventiveness—the plot so new,
The turn and trick subsidiary so strange !
She relishes that homely phrase of life,
That common town-talk, more than trumpet-blasts :
Accords him right to chop and change a myth :
What better right had he, who told the tale
In the first instance, to embellish fact ?
This last may disembellish yet improve !
Both find a block : this man carves back to bull
What first his predecessor cut to sphynx :
Such genuine actual roarer, nature's brute,
Intelligible to our time, was sure
The old-world artist's purpose, had he worked
To mind ; this both means and makes the thing !
If, past dispute, the verse slips oily-bathed
In unctuous music—say, effeminate—
We also say, like Kuthereia's self,
A lulling effluence which enswathes some isle
Where hides a nymph, not seen but felt the more.
That 's Hellas' verdict !

"Does Euripides
Even so far absolved, remain content?
Nowise! His task is to refine, refine,
Divide, distinguish, subtilize away
Whatever seemed a solid planting-place
For foot-fall,—not in that phantasmal sphere
Proper to poet, but on vulgar earth
Where people used to tread with confidence.
There 's left no longer one plain positive
Enunciation incontestable
Of what is good, right, decent here on earth.
Nobody now can say 'this plot is mine,
Though but a plethron square,—my duty!'—
'Yours?
Mine, or at least not yours,' snaps somebody!
And, whether the dispute be parent-right
Or children's service, husband's privilege
Or wife's submission, there 's a snarling straight,
Smart passage of opposing 'yea' and 'nay,'
'Should,' 'should not,' till, howe'er the contest end,
Spectators go off sighing—Clever thrust!
Why was I so much hurried to pay debt,
Attend my mother, sacrifice an ox,
And set my name down 'for a trireme, good'?
Something I might have urged on t' other side!
No doubt, Kresphontes or Bellerophon
We don't meet every day; but Stab-and-stitch
The tailor—ere I turn the drachmas o'er
I owe him for a chiton, as he thinks,
I 'll pose the blockhead with an argument!

"So has he triumphed, your Euripides!
Oh, I concede, he rarely gained a prize:
That 's quite another matter! cause for that!
Still, when 't was got by Ions, Iophons,
Off he would pace confoundedly superb,

Supreme, no smile at movement on his mouth
Till Sokrates winked, whispered : out it broke !
And Aristullos jotted down the jest,
While Iophons or Ions, bay on brow,
Looked queerly, and the foreigners—like you—
Asked o'er the border with a puzzled smile
—'And so, you value Ions, Iophons,
Euphorions ! How about Euripides ?'
(Eh, brave bard's-champion? Does the anger boil?
Keep within bounds a moment,—eye and lip
Shall loose their doom on me, their fiery worst !)
What strangers ? Archelaos heads the file !
He sympathizes, he concerns himself,
He pens epistle, each successless play :
'Athenai sinks effete ; there 's younger blood
In Makedonia. Visit where I rule !
Do honour to me and take gratitude !
Live the guest's life, or work the poet's way,
Which also means the statesman's : he who wrote
Erechtheus may seem rawly politic
At home where Kleophon is ripe ; but here
My council-board permits him choice of seats.'

"Now this was operating,—what should prove
A poison-tree, had flowered far on to fruit
For many a year,—when I was moved, first man,
To dare the adventure, down with root and branch.
So, from its sheath I drew my Comic steel,
And dared what I am now to justify.
A serious question first, though !

"Once again !
Do you believe, when I aspired in youth,
I made no estimate of power at all,
Nor paused long, nor considered much, what class
Of fighters I might claim to join, beside
That class wherewith I cast in company ?

Say, you—profuse of praise no less than blame—
Could not I have competed—franker phrase
Might trulier correspond to meaning—still,
Competed with your Tragic paragon?
Suppose me minded simply to make verse,
To fabricate, parade resplendent arms,
Flourish and sparkle out a Trilogy,—
Where was the hindrance? But my soul bade
'Fight!
Leave flourishing for mock-foe, pleasure-time;
Prove arms efficient on real heads and hearts!'
How? With degeneracy sapping fast
The Marathonian muscle, nerved of old
To maul the Mede, now strung at best to help
—How did I fable?—War and Hubbub mash
To mincemeat Fatherland and Brotherhood,
Pound in their mortar Hellas, State by State,
That greed might gorge, the while frivolity
Rubbed hands and smacked lips o'er the dainty
dish!
Authority, experience—pushed aside
By any upstart who pleads throng and press
O' the people! 'Think, say, do thus! Where-
fore, pray?
'We are the people: who impugns our right
Of choosing Kleon that tans hide so well,
Huperbolos that turns out lamps so trim,
Hemp-seller Eukrates or Lusikles
Sheep-dealer, Kephalos the potter's son,
Diitriphes who weaves the willow-work
To go round bottles, and Nausikudes
The meal-man? Such we choose and more, their
mates,
To think and say and do in our behalf!'
While sophistry wagged tongue, emboldened still,
Found matter to propose, contest, defend,

'Stablish, turn topsyturvy,—all the same,
No matter what, provided the result
Were something new in place of something old,—
Set wagging by pure insolence of soul
Which needs must pry into, have warrant for
Each right, each privilege good policy
Protects from curious eye and prating mouth !
Everywhere lust to shape the world anew,
Spurn this Athenai as we find her, build
A new impossible Cloudcuckooburg
For feather-headed birds, once solid men,
Where rules, discarding jolly habitude,
Nourished on myrtle-berries and stray ants,
King Tereus who, turned Hoopoe Triple-Crest,
Shall terrify and bring the gods to terms !

"Where was I? Oh ! Things ailing thus—I ask,
What cure? Cut, thrust, hack, hew at heap-on-
heaped
Abomination with the exquisite
Palaistra-tool of polished Tragedy?
Erechtheus shall harangue Amphiktuon,
And incidentally drop word of weight
On justice, righteousness, so turn aside
The audience from attacking Sicily !—
The more that Choros, after he recounts
How Phrixos rode the ram, the far-famed Fleece,
Shall add—at last fall of grave dancing-foot—
'Aggression never yet was helped by Zeus !'
That helps or hinders Alkibiades ?
As well expect, should Pheidias carve Zeus' self
And set him up, some half a mile away,
His frown would frighten sparrows from your field !
Eagles may recognize their lord, belike,
But as for vulgar sparrows,—change the god,
And plant some big Priapos with a pole !

I wield the Comic weapon rather—hate!
Hate! honest, earnest and directest hate—
Warfare wherein I close with enemy,
Call him one name and fifty epithets,
Remind you his great-grandfather sold bran,
Describe the new exomion, sleeveless coat
He knocked me down last night and robbed me of,
Protest he voted for a tax on air!
And all this hate—if I write Comedy—
Finds tolerance, most like—applause, perhaps
True veneration; for I praise the god
Present in person of his minister,
And pay—the wilder my extravagance—
The more appropriate worship to the Power
Adulterous, night-roaming, and the rest:
Otherwise,—that originative force
Of nature, impulse stirring death to life,
Which, underlying law, seems lawlessness,
Yet is the outbreak which, ere order be,
Must thrill creation through, warm stocks and stones,
Phales Iacchos.

"Comedy for me!
Why not for you, my Tragic masters? Sneaks
Whose art is mere desertion of a trust!
Such weapons lay to hand, the ready club,
The clay-ball, on the ground a stone to snatch,—
Arms fit to bruise the boar's neck, break the chine
O' the wolf,—and you must impiously—despise?
No, I 'll say, furtively let fall that trust
Consigned you! 'T was not 'take or leave alone,'
But 'take and, wielding, recognize your god
In his prime attributes!' And though full soon
You sneaked, subsided into poetry,
Nor met your due reward, still,—heroize

And speechify and sing-song and forego
Far as you may your function,—still its pact
Endures, one piece of early homage still
Exacted of you ; after your three bouts
At hoitytoity, great men with long words,
And so forth,—at the end, must tack itself
The genuine sample, the Satyric Play,
Concession, with its wood-boys' fun and freak,
To the true taste of the mere multitude.
Yet, there again ! What does your Still-at-itch,
Always-the-innovator ? Shrugs and shirks !
Out of his fifty Trilogies, some five
Are somehow suited : Satyrs dance and sing,
Try merriment, a grimly prank or two,
Sour joke squeezed through pursed lips and teeth on edge,
Then quick on top of toe to pastoral sport,
Goat-tending and sheep-herding, cheese and cream,
Soft grass and silver rillets, country-fare—
When throats were promised Thasian ! Five such feats,—
Then frankly off he threw the yoke : next Droll,
Next festive drama, covenanted fun,
Decent reversion to indecency,
Proved—your 'Alkestis' ! There 's quite fun enough,
Herakles drunk ! From out fate's blackening wave
Calamitous, just zigzags some shot star,
Poor promise of faint joy, and turns the laugh
On dupes whose fears and tears were all in waste !

" For which sufficient reasons, in truth's name,
I closed with whom you count the Meaner Muse,
Classed me with Comic Poets who should weld
Dark with bright metal, show their blade may keep
Its adamantine birthright though a-blaze

With poetry, the gold, and wit, the gem,
And strike mere gold, unstiffened out by steel,
Or gem, no iron joints its strength around,
From hand of—posturer, not combatant!

"Such was my purpose: it succeeds, I say!
Have not we beaten Kallikratidas,
Not humbled Sparté? Peace awaits our word,
Spite of Theramenes, and fools his like.
Since my previsions,—warranted too well
By the long war now waged and worn to end—
Had spared such heritage of misery,
My after-counsels scarce need fear repulse.
Athenai, taught prosperity has wings,
Cages the glad recapture. Demos, see,
From folly's premature decrepitude
Boiled young again, emerges from the stew
Of twenty-five years' trouble, sits and sways,
One brilliance and one balsam,—sways and sits
Monarch of Hellas! ay and, sage again,
No longer jeopardizes chieftainship,
No longer loves the brutish demagogue
Appointed by a bestial multitude
But seeks out sound advisers. Who are they?
Ourselves, of parentage proved wise and good!
To such may hap strains thwarting quality,
(As where shall want its flaw mere human stuff?)
Still, the right grain is proper to right race;
What 's contrary, call curious accident!
Hold by the usual! Orchard-grafted tree,
Not wilding, race-horse-sired, not rouncey-born,
Aristocrat, no sausage-selling snob!
Nay, why not Alkibiades, come back
Filled by the Genius, freed of petulance,
Frailty,—mere youthfulness that 's all at fault,—
Advanced to Perikles and something more?

—Being at least our duly born and bred,—
Curse on what chaunoprockt first gained his ear
And got his . . . well, once true man in right
place,
Our commonalty soon content themselves
With doing just what they are born to do,
Eat, drink, make merry, mind their own affairs
And leave state-business to the larger brain.
I do not stickle for their punishment;
But certain culprits have a cloak to twitch,
A purse to pay the piper: flog, say I,
Your fine fantastics, paragons of parts,
Who choose to play the important! Far from
side
With us, their natural supports, allies,—
And, best by brain, help who are best by birth
To fortify each weak point in the wall
Built broad and wide and deep for permanence
Between what 's high and low, what 's rare and
vile,—
They cast their lot perversely in with low
And vile, lay flat the barrier, lift the mob
To dizzy heights where Privilege stood firm.
And then, simplicity become conceit,—
Woman, slave, common soldier, artisan,
Crazy with new-found worth, new-fangled claims,—
These must be taught next how to use their heads
And hands in driving man's right to mob's rule!
What fellows thus inflame the multitude?
Your Sokrates, still crying 'Understand!'
Your Aristullos,—'Argue!' Last and worst,
Should, by good fortune, mob still hesitate,
Remember there 's degree in heaven and earth,
Cry 'Aischulos enjoined us fear the gods,
And Sophokles advised respect the kings!'
Why, your Euripides informs them—'Gods?

They are not! Kings? They are, but . . . do
not I,
In Suppliants, make my Theseus,—yours, no
more,—
Fire up at insult of who styles him King?
Play off that Herald, I despise the most,
As patronizing kings' prerogative
Against a Theseus proud to dare no step
Till he consult the people?'

"Such as these—
Ah, you expect I am for strangling straight?
Nowise, Balaustion! All my roundabout
Ends at beginning, with my own defence.
I dose each culprit just with—Comedy.
Let each be doctored in exact the mode
Himself prescribes: by words, the word-monger—
My words to his words,—my lies, if you like,
To his lies. Sokrates I nickname thief,
Quack, necromancer; Aristullos,—say,
Male Kirké who bewitches and bewrays
And changes folk to swine; Euripides,—
Well, I acknowledge! Every word is false,
Looked close at; but stand distant and stare
through,
All 's absolute indubitable truth
Behind lies, truth which only lies declare!
For come, concede me truth 's in thing not word,
Meaning not manner! Love smiles 'rogue' and
'wretch'
When 'sweet' and 'dear' seem vapid: Hate adopts
Love's 'sweet' and 'dear' when 'rogue' and
'wretch' fall flat:
Love, Hate—are truths, then, each, in sense not
sound.
Further: if Love, remaining Love, fell back

On 'sweet' and 'dear,'—if Hate, though Hate the same,
Dropped down to 'rogue' and 'wretch,'—each phrase were false.
Good! and now grant I hate no matter whom
With reason: I must therefore fight my foe,
Finish the mischief which made enmity.
How? By employing means to most hurt him
Who much harmed me. What way did he do harm?
Through word or deed? Through word? with word, wage war!
Word with myself directly? As direct
Reply shall follow: word to you, the wise,
Whence indirectly came the harm to me?
What wisdom I can muster waits on such.
Word to the populace which, misconceived
By ignorance and incapacity,
Ends in no such effect as follows cause
When I, or you the wise, are reasoned with,
So damages what I and you hold dear?
In that event, I ply the populace
With just such word as leavens their whole lump
To the right ferment for my purpose. *They*
Arbitrate properly between us both?
They weigh my answer with his argument,
Match quip with quibble, wit with eloquence?
All they attain to understand is—blank!
Two adversaries differ: which is right
And which is wrong, none takes on him to say,
Since both are unintelligible. Pooh!
Swear my foe's mother vended herbs she stole,
They fall a-laughing! Add,—his household drudge
Of all-work justifies that office well,
Kisses the wife, composing him the play,—

They grin at whom they gaped in wonderment,
And go off—'Was he such a sorry scrub?
This other seems to know! we praised too fast!'
Why then, my lies have done the work of truth,
Since 'scrub,' improper designation, means
Exactly what the proper argument
—Had such been comprehensible—proposed
To proper audience—were I graced with such—
Would properly result in; so your friend
Gets an impartial verdict on his verse
'The tongue swears, but the soul remains unsworn!'

"There, my Balaustion! All is summed and said.
No other cause of quarrel with yourself!
Euripides and Aristophanes
Differ: he needs must round our difference
Into the mob's ear; with the mob I plead.
You angrily start forward 'This to me?'
No speck of this on you the thrice refined!
Could parley be restricted to us two,
My first of duties were to clear up doubt
As to our true divergence each from each.
Does my opinion so diverge from yours?
Probably less than little—not at all!
To know a matter, for my very self
And intimates—that 's one thing; to imply
By 'knowledge'—loosing whatsoe'er I know
Among the vulgar who, by mere mistake,
May brain themselves and me in consequence,—
That 's quite another. 'O the daring flight!
This only bard maintains the exalted brow,
Nor grovels in the slime nor fears the gods!'
Did *I* fear—*I* play superstitious fool,
Who, with the due proviso, introduced,
Active and passive, their whole company
As creatures too absurd for scorn itself?

Zeus? I have styled him—'slave, mere thrash-
ing-block!'
I 'll tell you: in my very next of plays,
At Bacchos' feast, in Bacchos' honour, full
In front of Bacchos' representative,
I mean to make main-actor—Bacchos' self!
Forth shall he strut, apparent, first to last,
A blockhead, coward, braggart, liar, thief,
Demonstrated all these by his own mere
Xanthias the man-slave: such man shows such god
Shamed to brute-beastship by comparison!
And when ears have their fill of his abuse,
And eyes are sated with his pummelling,—
My Choros taking care, by, all the while,
Singing his glory, that men recognize
A god in the abused and pummelled beast,—
Then, should one ear be stopped of auditor,
Should one spectator shut revolted eye,—
Why, the Priest's self will first raise outraged voice
'Back, thou barbarian, thou ineptitude!
Does not most license hallow best our day,
And least decorum prove its strictest rite?
Since Bacchos bids his followers play the fool,
And there 's no fooling like a majesty
Mocked at,—who mocks the god, obeys the law—
Law which, impute but indiscretion to,
And . . . why, the spirit of Euripides
Is evidently active in the world!'
Do I stop here? No! feat of flightier force!
See Hermes! what commotion raged,—reflect!—
When imaged god alone got injury
By drunkards' frolic! How Athenai stared
Aghast, then fell to frenzy, fit on fit,—
Ever the last the longest! At this hour,
The craze abates a little; so, my Play
Shall have up Hermes: and a Karion, slave,

(Since there 's no getting lower) calls our friend
The profitable god, we honour so.
Whatever contumely fouls the mouth—
Bids him go earn more honest livelihood
By washing tripe in well-trough—wash he does,
Duly obedient ! Have I dared my best ?
Asklepios, answer !—deity in vogue,
Who visits Sophokles familiarly,
If you believe the old man,—at his age,
Living is dreaming, and strange guests haunt door
Of house, belike, peep through and tap at times
When a friend yawns there, waiting to be fetched,—
At any rate, to memorize the fact,
He has spent money, set an altar up
In the god's temple, now in much repute.
That temple-service trust me to describe—
Cheaters and choused, the god, his brace of girls,
Their snake, and how they manage to snap gifts
'And consecrate the same into a bag,'
For whimsies done away with in the dark !
As if, a stone's throw from that theatre
Whereon I thus unmask their dupery,
The thing were not religious and august !

"Of Sophokles himself—nor word nor sign
Beyond a harmless parody or so !
He founds no anti-school, upsets no faith,
But, living, lets live, the good easy soul
Who,—if he saves his cash, unpoetlike,
Loves wine and—never mind what other sport,
Boasts for his father just a sword-blade-smith,
Proves but queer captain when the people claim,
For one who conquered with 'Antigone,'
The right to undertake a squadron's charge,—
And needs the son's help now to finish plays,
Seeing his dotage calls for governance

And Iophon to share his property,—
Why, of all this, reported true, I breathe
Not one word—true or false, I like the man.
Sophokles lives and lets live : long live he !
Otherwise,—sharp the scourge and hard the blow !

" And what 's my teaching but—accept the old,
Contestthestrange! acknowledgeworkthat'sdone,
Misdoubt men who have still their work to do !
Religions, laws and customs, poetries,
Are old ? So much achieved victorious truth !
Each work was product of a life-time, wrung
From each man by an adverse world : for why ?
He worked, destroying other older work
Which the world loved and so was loth to lose.
Whom the world beat in battle—dust and ash !
Who beat the world, left work in evidence,
And wears its crown till new men live new lives,
And fight new fights, and triumph in their turn.
I mean to show you on the stage : you 'll see
My Just Judge only venture to decide
Between two suitors, which is god, which man,
By thrashing both of them as flesh can bear.
You shall agree,—whichever bellows first,
He 's human ; who holds longest out, divine :
That is the only equitable test.
Cruelty ? Pray, who pricked them on to court
My thong's award ? Must they needs dominate ?
Then I—rebel. Their instinct grasps the new ?
Mine bids retain the old : a fight must be,
And which is stronger the event will show.
O but the pain ! Your proved divinity
Still smarts all reddened ? And the rightlier served !
Was not some man's-flesh in him, after all ?
Do let us lack no frank acknowledgment
There 's nature common to both gods and men !

All of them—spirit? What so winced was clay.
Away pretence to some exclusive sphere
Cloud-nourishing a sole selected few
Fume-fed with self-superiority!
I stand up for the common coarse-as-clay
Existence,—stamp and ramp with heel and hoof
On solid vulgar life, you fools disown.
Make haste from your unreal eminence,
And measure lengths with me upon that ground
Whence this mud-pellet sings and summons you!
I know the soul, too, how the spark ascends
And how it drops apace and dies away.
I am your poet-peer, man thrice your match.
I too can lead an airy life when dead,
Fly like Kinesias when I 'm cloudward bound;
But here, no death shall mix with life it mars.

"So, my old enemy who caused the fight,
Own I have beaten you, Euripides!
Or,—if your advocate would contravene,—
Help him, Balaustion! Use the rosy strength!
I have not done my utmost,—treated you
As I might Aristullos, mint-perfumed,—
Still, let the whole rage burst in brave attack!
Don't pay the poor ambiguous compliment
Of fearing any pearl-white knuckled fist
Will damage this broad buttress of a brow!
Fancy yourself my Aristonumos,
Ameipsias or Sannurion: punch and pound!
Three cuckoos who cry 'cuckoo'! much I care!
They boil a stone! *Neblaretai! Rattei!*"

Cannot your task have end here, Euthukles?
Day by day glides our galley on its path:
Still sunrise and still sunset, Rhodes half-reached,

And still, my patient scribe! no sunset's peace
Descends more punctual than that brow's incline
O'er tablets which your serviceable hand
Prepares to trace. Why treasure up, forsooth,
These relics of a night that make me rich,
But, half-remembered merely, leave so poor
Each stranger to Athenai and her past?
For—how remembered! As some greedy hind
Persuades a honeycomb, beyond the due,
To yield its hoarding,—heedless what alloy
Of the poor bee's own substance taints the gold
Which, unforced, yields few drops, but purity,—
So would you fain relieve of load this brain,
Though the hived thoughts must bring away, with strength,
What words and weakness, strength's receptacle—
Wax from the store! Yet,—aching soothed away,—
Accept the compound! No suspected scent
But proves some rose was rifled, though its ghost
Scarce lingers with what promised musk and myrrh.
No need of farther squeezing. What remains
Can only be Balaustion, just her speech.

Ah, but—because speech serves a purpose still!—

He ended with that flourish. I replied,

Fancy myself your Aristonumos?
Advise me, rather, to remain myself,
Balaustion,—mindful what mere mouse confronts
The forest-monarch Aristophanes!
I who, a woman, claim no quality
Beside the love of all things loveable
Created by a power pre-eminent
In knowledge, as in love I stand perchance,

—You, the consummately-creative! How
Should I, then, dare deny submissive trust
To any process aiming at result
Such as you say your songs are pregnant with?
Result, all judge: means, let none scrutinize
Save those aware how glory best is gained
By daring means to end, ashamed of shame,
Constant in faith that only good works good,
While evil yields no fruit but impotence!
Graced with such plain good, I accept the means.
Nay, if result itself in turn become
Means,—who shall say?—to ends still loftier yet,—
Though still the good prove hard to understand,
The bad still seemingly predominate,—
Never may I forget which order bears
The burden, toils to win the great reward,
And finds, in failure, the grave punishment,
So, meantime, claims of me a faith I yield!
Moreover, a mere woman, I recoil
From what may prove man's-work permissible,
Imperative. Rough strokes surprise: what then?
Some lusty armsweep needs must cause the crash
Of thorn and bramble, ere those shrubs, those
flowers,
We fain would have earth yield exclusively,
Are sown, matured and garlanded for boys
And girls, who know not how the growth was
gained.
Finally, am I not a foreigner?
No born and bred Athenian,—isled about,
I scarce can drink, like you, at every breath,
Just some particular doctrine which may best
Explain the strange thing I revolt against—
How—by involvement, who may extricate?—
Religion perks up through impiety,
Law leers with licence, folly wise-like frowns,

The seemly lurks inside the abominable.
But opposites,—each neutralizes each
Haply by mixture : what should promise death,
May haply give the good ingredient force,
Disperse in fume the antagonistic ill.
This institution, therefore,—Comedy,—
By origin, a rite,—by exercise,
Proved an achievement tasking poet's power
To utmost, eking legislation out
Beyond the legislator's faculty,
Playing the censor where the moralist
Declines his function, far too dignified
For dealing with minute absurdities :
By efficacy,—virtue's guard, the scourge
Of vice, each folly's fly-flap, arm in aid
Of all that 's righteous, customary, sound
And wholesome; sanctioned therefore,—better say,
Prescribed for fit acceptance of this age
By, not alone the long recorded roll
Of earlier triumphs but, success to-day—
(The multitude as prompt recipient still
Of good gay teaching from that monitor
They crowned this morning—Aristophanes—
As when Sousarion's car first traversed street)
This product of Athenai—*I* dispute,
Impugn? There 's just one only circumstance
Explains that! I, poor critic, see, hear, feel;
But eyes, ears, senses prove me—foreigner!
Who shall gainsay that the raw new-come guest
Blames oft, too sensitive? On every side
Of—larger than your stage—life's spectacle,
Convention here permits and there forbids
Impulse and action, nor alleges more
Than some mysterious "So do all, and so
Does no one :" which the hasty stranger blames
Because, who bends the head unquestioning,

Transgresses, turns to wrong what else were right,
By failure of a reference to law
Beyond convention ; blames unjustly, too—
As if, through that defect, all gained were lost
And slave-brand set on brow indelibly ;—
Blames unobservant or experienceless
That men, like trees, if stout and sound and sane,
Show stem no more affected at the root
By bough's exceptional submissive dip
Of leaf and bell, light danced at end of spray
To windy fitfulness in wayward sport—
No more lie prostrate—than low files of flower
Which, when the blast goes by, unruffled raise
Each head again o'er ruder meadow-wreck
Of thorn and thistle that refractory
Demurred to cower at passing wind's caprice.
Why shall not guest extend like charity,
Conceive how,—even when astounded most
That natives seem to acquiesce in muck
Changed by prescription, they affirm, to gold,—
Such may still bring to test, still bear away
Safely and surely much of good and true
Though latent ore, themselves unspecked, un-
spoiled ?
Fresh bathed i' the icebrook, any hand may pass
A placid moment through the lamp's fierce flame:
And who has read your|Lemnians, seen The Hours,
Heard Female-Playhouse-seat-Preoccupants,
May feel no worse effect than, once a year,
Those who leave decent vesture, dress in rags
And play the mendicant, conform thereby
To country's rite, and then, no beggar-taint
Retained, don vesture due next morrow-day.
What if I share the stranger's weakness then ?
Well, could I also show his strength, his sense
Untutored, ay !—but then untampered with !

I fancy, though the world seems old enough,
Though Hellas be the sole unbarbarous land,
Years may conduct to such extreme of age,
And outside Hellas so isles new may lurk,
That haply,—when and where remain a dream !—
In fresh days when no Hellas fills the world,
In novel lands as strange where, all the same,
Their men and women yet behold, as we,
Blue heaven, black earth, and love, hate, hope and fear,
Over again, unhelped by Attiké—
Haply some philanthropic god steers bark,
Gift-laden, to the lonely ignorance
Islanded, say, where mist and snow mass hard
To metal—ay, those Kassiterides !
Then asks : " Ye apprehend the human form.
What of this statue, made to Pheidias' mind,
This picture, as it pleased our Zeuxis paint ?
Ye too feel truth, love beauty : judge of these ! "
Such strangers may judge feebly, stranger-like :
" Each hair too indistinct—for, see our own !
Hands, not skin-coloured as these hands we have,
And lo, the want of due decorum here !
A citizen, arrayed in civic garb,
Just as he walked your streets apparently,
Yet wears no sword by side, adventures thus,
In thronged Athenai ! foolish painter's-freak !
While here 's his brother-sculptor found at fault
Still more egregiously, who shames the world,
Shows wrestler, wrestling at the public games,
Atrociously exposed from head to foot ! "
Sure, the Immortal would impart at once
Our slow-stored knowledge, how small truths suppressed
Conduce to the far greater truth's display,—
Would replace simple by instructed sense,

And teach them how Athenai first sc tamed
The natural fierceness that her progeny
Discarded arms nor feared the beast in man :
Wherefore at games, where earth's wise gratitude,
Proved by responsive culture, claimed the prize
For man's mind, body, each in excellence,—
When mind had bared itself, came body's turn,
And only irreligion grudged the gods
One naked glory of their master-work
Where all is glorious rightly understood,—
The human frame ; enough that man mistakes :
Let him not think the gods mistaken too !
But, peradventure, if the stranger's eye
Detected . . . Ah, too high my fancy-flight !
Pheidias, forgive, and Zeuxis bear with me—
How on your faultless should I fasten fault
Of my own framing, even ? Only say,—
Suppose the impossible were realized,
And some as patent incongruity,
Unseemliness,—of no more warrant, there
And then, than now and here, whate'er the time
And place,—I say, the Immortal—who can doubt ?—
Would never shrink, but own "The blot escaped
Our artist : thus he shows humanity."

May stranger tax one peccant part in thee,
Poet, three-parts divine ? May I proceed ?

"Comedy is prescription and a rite."
Since when ? No growth of the blind antique time,
"It rose in Attiké with liberty ;
When freedom falls, it too will fall." Scarce so !
Your games,—the Olympian, Zeus gave birth to these ;

Your Pythian,—these were Phoibos' institute.
Isthmian, Nemeian,—Theseus, Herakles
Appointed each, the boys and barbers say!
Earth's day is growing late: where 's Comedy?
"Oh, that commenced an age since,—two, belike,—
In Megara, whence here they brought the thing!"
Or I misunderstand, or here 's the fact—
Your grandsire could recall that rustic song,
How suchanone was thief, and miser such
And how,—immunity from chastisement
Once promised to bold singers of the same
By daylight on the drunkard's holiday,—
The clever fellow of the joyous troop
Tried acting what before he sang about,
Acted and stole, or hoarded, acting too:
While his companions ranged a-row, closed up
For Choros,—bade the general rabblement
Sit, see, hear, laugh,—not join the dance themselves.
Soon, the same clever fellow found a mate,
And these two did the whole stage-mimicking,
Still closer in approach to Tragedy,—
So led the way to Aristophanes,
Whose grandsire saw Sousarion, and whose sire—
Chionides; yourself wrote "Banqueters"
When Aischulos had made "Prometheus," nay,
All of the marvels; Sophokles,—I 'll cite,
"Oidipous"—and Euripides—I bend
The head—"Medeia" henceforth awed the world!
"Banqueters," "Babylonians"—next come you!
Surely the great days that left Hellas free
Happened before such advent of huge help,
Eighty-years-late assistance? Marathon,
Plataia, Salamis were fought, I think,
Before new educators stood reproved,
Or foreign legates blushed, excepted to!

Where did the helpful rite pretend its rise?
Did it break forth, as gifts divine are wont,
Plainly authentic, incontestably
Adequate to the helpful ordinance?
Founts, dowered with virtue, pulse out pure from source;
'T is there we taste the god's benign intent:
Not when,—fatigued away by journey, foul
With brutish trampling,—crystal sinks to slime,
And lymph forgets the first salubriousness.
Sprang Comedy to light thus crystal-pure?
"Nowise!" yourself protest with vehemence;
"Gross, bestial, did the clowns' diversion break;
Every successor paddled in the slush;
Nay, my contemporaries one and all
Gay played the mudlark till I joined their game;
Then was I first to change buffoonery
For wit, and stupid filth for cleanly sense,
Transforming pointless joke to purpose fine,
Transfusing rude enforcement of home-law—
'Drop knave's-tricks, deal more neighbour-like, ye boors!'—
With such new glory of poetic breath
As, lifting application far past use
O' the present, launched it o'er men's lowly heads
To future time, when high and low alike
Are dead and done with, while my airy power
Flies disengaged, as vapour from what stuff
It—say not, dwelt in—fitlier, dallied with
To forward work, which done,—deliverance brave,—
It soars away, and mud subsides to dust.
Say then, myself invented Comedy!"

So mouths full many a famed Parabasis!
Agreed! No more, then, of prescriptive use,

Authorization by antiquity,
For what offends our judgment! 'T is your work,
Performed your way: not work delivered you
Intact, intact producible in turn.
Everywhere have you altered old to new—
Your will, your warrant: therefore, work must stand
Or stumble by intrinsic worth. What worth?
Its aim and object! Peace you advocate,
And war would fain abolish from the land:
Support religion, lash irreverence,
Yet laughingly administer rebuke
To superstitious folly,—equal fault!
While innovating rashness, lust of change,
New laws, new habits, manners, men and things,
Make your main quarry,—"oldest" meaning
"best."
You check the fretful litigation-itch,
Withstand mob-rule, expose mob-flattery,
Punish mob-favourites; most of all press hard
On sophists who assist the demagogue,
And poets their accomplices in crime.
Such your main quarry: by the way, you strike
Ignobler game, mere miscreants, snob or scamp,
Cowardly, gluttonous, effeminate:
Still with a bolt to spare when dramatist
Proves haply unproficient in his art.
Such aims—alone, no matter for the means—
Declare the unexampled excellence
Of their first author—Aristophanes!

Whereat—Euripides, oh, not thyself—
Augustlier than the need!—thy century
Of subjects dreamed and dared and done, before
"Banqueters" gave dark earth enlightenment,
Or "Babylonians" played Prometheus here,—
These let me summon to defend thy cause!

Lo, as indignantly took life and shape
Labour by labour, all of Herakles,—
Palpably fronting some o'erbold pretence
"Eurustheus slew the monsters, purged the world!"
So shall each poem pass you and imprint
Shame on the strange assurance. *You* praised Peace?
Sing him full-face, Kresphontes! "Peace" the theme?
"Peace, in whom depths of wealth lie,—of the blest
Immortals beauteousest,—
Come! for the heart within me dies away,
So long dost thou delay!
O I have feared lest old age, much annoy,
Conquer me, quite outstrip the tardy joy,
Thy gracious triumph-season I would see,
The song, the dance, the sport, profuse of crowns to be.
But come! for my sake, goddess great and dear,
Come to the city here!
Hateful Sedition drive thou from our homes,
With Her who madly roams
Rejoicing in the steel against the life
That 's whetted—banish Strife!"

Shall I proceed? No need of next and next!
That were too easy, play so presses play,
Trooping tumultuous, each with instance apt,
Each eager to confute the idle boast.
What virtue but stands forth panegyrized,
What vice, unburned by stigma, in the books
Which bettered Hellas,—beyond graven gold
Or gem indenture, sung by Phoibos' self
And saved in Kunthia's mountain treasure-house—
Ere you, man, moralist, were youth or boy?
—Not praise which, in the proffer, mocks the praised

By sly admixture of the blameworthy
And enforced coupling of base fellowship,—
Not blame which gloats the while it frowning laughs,
"Allow one glance on horrors—laughable!"—
This man's entire of heart and soul, discharged
Its love or hate, each unalloyed by each,
On objects worthy either; earnestness,
Attribute him, and power! but novelty?
Nor his nor yours a doctrine—all the world's!
What man of full-grown sense and sanity
Holds other than the truth,—wide Hellas through,—
Though truth, he acts, discredit truth he holds?
What imbecile has dared to formulate
"Love war, hate peace, become a litigant!"—
And so preach on, reverse each rule of right
Because he quarrels, combats, goes to law?
No, for his comment runs, with smile or sigh
According to heart's temper, "Peace were best,
Except occasions when we put aside
Peace, and bid all the blessings in her gift
Quick join the crows, for sake of Marathon!"

"Nay," you reply; for one, whose mind withstands
His heart, and, loving peace, for conscience' sake
Wants war,—you find a crowd of hypocrites
Whose conscience means ambition, grudge and greed.
On such, reproof, sonorous doctrine, melts
Distilled like universal but thin dew
Which all too sparsely covers country: dear,
No doubt, to universal crop and clown,
Still, each bedewed keeps his own head-gear dry
With upthrust *skiadeion*, shakes adroit
The droppings to his neighbour. No! collect
All of the moisture, leave unhurt the heads

Which nowise need a washing, save and store
And dash the whole condensed to one fierce spout
On some one evildoer, sheltered close,—
The fool supposed,—till you beat guard away,
And showed your audience, not that war was wrong,
But Lamachos absurd,—case, crests and all,—
Not that democracy was blind of choice,
But Kleon and Huperbolos were shams:
Not superstition vile, but Nikias crazed,—
The concrete for the abstract; that 's the way!
What matters Choros crying "Hence, impure!"
You cried "Ariphrades does thus and thus!"
Now, earnestness seems never earnest more
Than when it dons for garb—indifference;
So there 's much laughing: but, compensative,
When frowning follows laughter, then indeed
Scout innuendo, sarcasm, irony!—
Wit's polished warfare glancing at first graze
From off hard headpiece, coarsely-coated brain
O' the commonalty—whom, unless you prick
To purpose, what avails that finer pates
Succumb to simple scratching? Those—not these—
'T is Multitude, which, moved, fines Lamachos,
Banishes Kleon and burns Sokrates,
House over head, or, better, poisons him.
Therefore in dealing with King Multitude,
Club-drub the callous numskulls! In and in
Beat this essential consequential fact
That here they have a hater of the three,
Who hates in word, phrase, nickname, epithet
And illustration, beyond doubt at all!
And similarly, would you win assent
To—Peace, suppose? You tickle the tough hide
With good plain pleasure her concomitant—
And, past mistake again, exhibit Peace—

Peace, vintager and festive, cheesecake-time,
Hare-slice-and-peasoup-season, household joy :
Theoria's beautiful belongings match
Opora's lavish condescendings : brief,
Since here the people are to judge, you press
Such argument as people understand :
If with exaggeration—what care you ?

Have I misunderstood you in the main ?
No ! then must answer be, such argument,
Such policy, no matter what good love
Or hate it help, in practice proves absurd,
Useless and null : henceforward intercepts
Sober effective blow at what you blame,
And renders nugatory rightful praise
Of thing or person. The coarse brush has daubed—
What room for the fine limner's pencil-mark ?
Blame ? You curse, rather, till who blames must
blush—
Lean to apology or praise, more like !
Does garment, simpered o'er as white, prove grey?
"Black, blacker than Acharnian charcoal, black
Beyond Kimmerian, Stugian blackness black,"
You bawl, till men sigh "nearer snowiness !"
What follows ? What one faint-rewarding fall
Of foe belaboured ne'er so lustily ?
Laugh Lamachos from out the people's heart ?
He died, commanding, "hero," say yourself !
Gibe Nikias into privacy ?—nay, shake
Kleon a little from his arrogance
By cutting him to shoe-sole-shreds ? I think,
He ruled his life long and, when time was ripe,
Died fighting for amusement,—good tough hide !
Sokrates still goes up and down the streets,
And Aristullos puts his speech in book,
When both should be abolished long ago.

Nay, wretchedest of rags, Ariphrades—
You have been fouling that redoubtable
Harp-player, twenty years, with what effect?
Stiil he strums on, strums ever cheerily,
And earns his wage,—"Who minds a joke?"
men say.
No, friend! The statues stand—mudstained at
most—
Titan or pygmy: what achieves their fall
Will be, long after mud is flung and spent,
Some clear thin spirit-thrust of lightning—truth!

Your praise, then—honey-smearing helps your
friend,
More than blame's ordure-smirch hurts foe, per-
haps?
Peace, now, misunderstood, ne'er prized enough,
You have interpreted to ignorance
Till ignorance opes eye, bat-blind before,
Andfor the first time knows Peace means the power
On maw of pan-cake, cheese-cake, barley-cake,
No stop nor stint to stuffing. While, in camp,
Who fights chews rancid tunny, onions raw,
Peace sits at cosy feast with lamp and fire,
Complaisant smooth-sleeked flute-girls giggling
gay.
How thick and fast the snow falls, freezing War
Who shrugs, campaigns it, and may break a shin
Or twist an ankle! come, who hesitates
To give Peace, over War, the preference?
Ah, friend—had this indubitable fact
Haply occurred to poor Leonidas,
How had he turned tail on Thermopulai!
It cannot be that even his few wits
Were addled to the point that, so advised,
Preposterous he had answered—"Cakes are prime,

Hearth-sides are snug, sleek dancing-girls have
worth,
And yet—for country's sake, to save our gods
Their temples, save our ancestors their tombs,
Save wife and child and home and liberty,—
I would chew sliced-salt-fish, bear snow—nay,
starve,
If need were,—and by much prefer the choice!"
Why, friend, your genuine hero, all the while,
Has been—who served precisely for your butt—
Kleonumos that, wise, cast shield away
On battle-ground; cried "Cake my buckler be,
Embossed with cream-clot! peace, not war, I
choose,
Holding with Dikaiopolis!" Comedy
Shall triumph, Dikaiopolis win assent,
When Miltiades shall next shirk Marathon,
Themistokles swap Salamis for—cake,
And Kimon grunt "Peace, grant me dancing-
girls!"
But sooner, hardly! twenty-five years since,
Thewar began,—such pleasfor Peace have reached
A reasonable age. The end shows all.
And so with all the rest you advocate!
"Wise folk leave litigation! 'ware the wasps!
Whoso loves law and lawyers, heliast-like,
Wants hemlock!" None shows that so funnily.
But, once cure madness, how comports himself
Your sane exemplar, what 's our gain thereby?
Philokleon turns Bdelukleon! just this change,—
New sanity gets straightway drunk as sow,
Cheats baker-wives, brawls, kicks, cuffs, curses folk,
Parades a shameless flute-girl, bandies filth
With his own son who cured his father's cold
By making him catch fever—funnily!
But as for curing love of lawsuits—faugh!

And how does new improve upon the old
—Your boast—in even abusing? Rough, may be—
Still, honest was the old mode. "Call thief—thief!"
But never call thief even—murderer!
Much less call fop and fribble, worse one whit
Than fribble and fop! Spare neither! beat your brains
For adequate invective,—cut the life
Clean out each quality,—but load your lash
With no least lie, or we pluck scourge from hand!
Does poet want a whipping, write bad verse,
Inculcate foul deeds? There 's the fault to flog!
You vow "The rascal cannot read nor write,
Spends more in buying fish than Morsimos,
Somebody helps his Muse and courts his wife,
His uncle deals in crockery, and last,—
Himself 's a stranger!" That 's the cap and crown
Of stinging-nettle, that 's the master-stroke!
What poet-rival,—after "housebreaker,"
"Fish-gorging," "midnight footpad" and so forth,—
Proves not, beside, "a stranger"? Chased from charge
To charge, and, lie by lie, laughed out of court,—
Lo, wit's sure refuge, satire's grand resource—
All, from Kratinos downward—"strangers" they!
Pity the trick 's too facile! None so raw
Among your playmates but have caught the ball
And sent it back as briskly to—yourself!
You too, my Attic, are styled "stranger"—Rhodes,
Aigina, Lindos or Kameiros,—nay,
'T was Egypt reared, if Eupolis be right,
Who wrote the comedy (Kratinos vows)
Kratinos helped a little! Kleon's self
Was nigh promoted Comic, when he haled
My poet into court, and o'er the coals

Hauled and re-hauled "the stranger,—insolent,
Who brought out plays, usurped our privilege!"
Why must you Comics one and all take stand
On lower ground than truth from first to last?
Why all agree to let folk disbelieve,
So laughter but reward a funny lie?
Repel such onslaughts—answer, sad and grave,
Your fancy-fleerings—who would stoop so low?
Your own adherents whisper,—when disgust
Too menacingly thrills Logeion through
At—Perikles invents this present war
Because men robbed his mistress of three maids—
Or—Sokrates wants burning, house o'er head,—
"What, so obtuse, not read between the lines?
Our poet means no mischief! All should know—
Ribaldry here implies a compliment!
He deals with things, not men,—his men are
things—
Each represents a class, plays figure-head
And names the ship: no meaner than the first
Would serve; he styles a trireme 'Sokrates'—
Fears 'Sokrates' may prove unseaworthy
(That 's merely—'Sophists are the bane of boys')
Rat-riddled ('they are capable of theft'),
Rotten or whatsoe'er shows ship-disease,
('They war with gods and worship whirligig').
You never took the joke for earnest? scarce
Supposed mere figure-head meant entire ship,
And Sokrates—the whole fraternity?"

This then is Comedy, our sacred song,
Censor of vice, and virtue's guard as sure:
Manners-instructing, morals' stop-estray,
Which, born a twin with public liberty,
Thrives with its welfare, dwindles with its wane!
Liberty? what so exquisitely framed

And fitted to suck dry its life of life
To last faint fibre?—since that life is truth.
You who profess your indignation swells
At sophistry, when specious words confuse
Deeds right and wrong, distinct before, you say—
(Though all that 's done is—dare veracity,
Show that the true conception of each deed
Affirmed, in vulgar parlance, "wrong" or "right,"
Proves to be neither, as the hasty hold,
But, change your side, shoots light, where dark alone
Was apprehended by the vulgar sense)
You who put sophistry to shame, and shout
"There 's but a single side to man and thing;
A side so much more big than thing or man
Possibly can be, that—believe 't is true?
Such were too marvellous simplicity!"—
Confess, those sophists whom yourself depict,
(—Abide by your own painting!) what they teach,
They wish at least their pupil to believe,
And, what believe, to practise! Did *you* wish
Hellas should haste, as taught, with torch in hand,
And fire the horrid Speculation-shop?
Straight the shop's master rose and showed the mob
What man was your so monstrous Sokrates;
Himself received amusement, why not they?
Just as did Kleon first play magistrate
And bid you put your birth in evidence—
Since no unbadged buffoon is licensed here
To shame us all when foreign guests may mock—
Then,—birth established, fooling licensed you,—
He, duty done, resumed mere auditor,
Laughed with the loudest at his Lamia-shape,
Kukloboros-roaring, and the camel-rest.
Nay, Aristullos,—once your volley spent
On the male-Kirké and her swinish crew,—

PLATON,—so others call the youth we love,—
Sends your performance to the curious king—
"Do you desire to know Athenai's knack
At turning seriousness to pleasantry?
Read this! One Aristullos means myself.
The author is indeed a merry grig!"
Nay, it would seem as if yourself were bent
On laying down the law "Tell lies I must—
Aforethought and of purpose, no mistake!"
When forth yourself step, tell us from the stage
"Here you behold the King of Comedy—
Me, who, the first, have purged my every piece
From each and all my predecessors' filth,
Abjured those satyr-adjuncts sewn to bid
The boys laugh, satyr-jokes whereof not one
Least sample but would make my hair turn grey
Beyond a twelvemonth's ravage! I renounce
Mountebank-claptrap, such as firework-fizz
And torchflare, or else nuts and barleycorns
Scattered among the crowd, to scramble for
And stop their mouths with; no such stuff shames
me!
Who,—what 's more serious,—know both when
to strike
And when to stay my hand: once dead, my foe,
Why, done, my fighting! *I* attack a corpse?
I spare the corpse-like even! punish age?
I pity from my soul that sad effete
Toothless old mumbler called Kratinos! once
My rival,—now, alack, the dotard slinks
Ragged and hungry to what hole 's his home;
Ay, slinks thro' byways where no passenger
Flings him a bone to pick. You formerly
Adored the Muses' darling: dotard now,
Why, he may starve! O mob most mutable!"
So you harangued in person; while,—to point

Precisely out, these were but lies you launched,—
Prompt, a play followed primed with satyr-frisks,
No spice spared of the stomach-turning stew,
Full-fraught with torch-display, and barley-throw,
And Kleon, dead enough, bedaubed afresh ;
While daft Kratinos—home to hole trudged he,
Wrung dry his wit to the last vinous dregs,
Decanted them to "Bottle,"—beat, next year,—
"Bottle" and dregs—your best of "Clouds" and dew !
Where, Comic King, may keenest eye detect
Improvement on your predecessors' work
Except in lying more audaciously ?

Why—genius ! That 's the grandeur, that 's the gold—
That 's *you*—superlatively true to touch—
Gold, leaf or lump—gold, anyhow the mass
Takes manufacture and proves Pallas' casque
Or, at your choice, simply a cask to keep
Corruption from decay. Your rivals' hoard
May ooze forth, lacking such preservative :
Yours cannot—gold plays guardian far too well !
Genius, I call *you* : dross, your rivals share ;
Ay, share and share alike, too ! says the world,
However you pretend supremacy
In aught beside that gold, your very own.
Satire ? "Kratinos for our satirist !"
The world cries. Elegance ? "Who elegant
As Eupolis ?" resounds as noisily.
Artistic fancy ? Choros-creatures quaint ?
Magnes invented "Birds" and "Frogs" enough,
Archippos punned, Hegemon parodied,
To heart's content, before you stepped on stage.
Moral invective ? Eupolis exposed
"That prating beggar, he who stole the cup,"

Before your "Clouds" rained grime on Sokrates;
Nay, what beat "Clouds" but "Konnos," muck
for mud?
Courage? How long before, well-masked, you
poured
Abuse on Eukrates and Lusikles,
Did Telekleides and Hermippos pelt
Their Perikles and Kimon? standing forth,
Bareheaded, not safe crouched behind a name,—
Philonides or else Kallistratos,
Put forth, when danger threatened,—mask for face,
To bear the brunt,—if blame fell, take the blame,—
If praise . . . why, frank laughed Aristophanes
"They write such rare stuff? No, I promise you!"
Rather, I see all true improvements, made
Or making, go against you—tooth and nail
Contended with; 't is still Moruchides,
'T is Euthumenes, Surakosios, nay,
Argurrhios and Kinesias,—common sense
And public shame, these only cleanse your stye!
Coerced, prohibited,—you grin and bear,
And, soon as may be, hug to heart again
The banished nastiness too dear to drop!
Krates could teach and practise festive song
Yet scorn scurrility; as gay and good,
Pherekrates could follow. *Who* loosed hold,
Must let fall rose-wreath, stoop to muck once more?
Did your particular self advance in aught,
Task the sad genius—steady slave the while—
To further—say, the patriotic aim?
No, there 's deterioration manifest
Year by year, play by play! survey them all,
From that boy's-triumph when "Acharnes" dawned,
To "Thesmophoriazousai,"—this man's-shame!
There, truly, patriot zeal so prominent
Allowed friends' plea perhaps: the baser stuff

Was but the nobler spirit's vehicle.
Who would imprison, unvolatilize
A violet's perfume, blends with fatty oils
Essence too fugitive in flower alone;
So, calling unguent—violet, call the play—
Obscenity impregnated with "Peace"!
But here 's the boy grown bald, and here 's the play
With twenty years' experience: where 's one spice
Of odour in the hog's-lard? what pretends
To aught except a grease-pot's quality?
Friend, sophist-hating! know,—worst sophistry
Is when man's own soul plays its own self false,
Reasons a vice into a virtue, pleads
"I detail sin to shame its author"—not
"I shame Ariphrades for sin's display"!
"I show Opora to commend Sweet Home"—
Not "I show Bacchis for the striplings' sake!"

Yet all the same—O genius and O gold—
Had genius ne'er diverted gold from use
Worthy the temple, to do copper's work
And coat a swine's trough—which abundantly
Might furnish Phoibos' tripod, Pallas' throne!
Had you, I dream, discarding all the base,
The brutish, spurned alone convention's watch
And ward against invading decency
Disguised as license, law in lawlessness,
And so, re-ordinating outworn rule,
Made Comedy and Tragedy combine,
Prove some new Both-yet-neither, all one bard,
Euripides with Aristophanes
Coöperant! this, reproducing Now
As that gave Then existence: Life to-day,
This, as that other—Life dead long ago!
The mob decrees such feat no crown, perchance,

But—why call crowning the reward of quest?
Tell him, my other poet,—where thou walk'st
Some rarer world than e'er Ilissos washed!
But dream goes idly in the air. To earth!
Earth's question just amounts to—which succeeds,
Which fails of two life-long antagonists?
Suppose my charges all mistake! assume
Your end, despite ambiguous means, the best—
The only! you and he, a patriot-pair,
Have striven alike for one result—say, Peace!
You spoke your best straight to the arbiters—
Our people: have you made them end this war
By dint of laughter and abuse and lies
And postures of Opora? Sadly—No!
This war, despite your twenty-five years' work,
May yet endure until Athenai falls,
And freedom falls with her. So much for you!
Now, the antagonist Euripides—
Has he succeeded better? Who shall say?
He spoke quite o'er the heads of Kleon's crowd
To a dim future, and if there he fail,
Why, you are fellows in adversity.
But that 's unlike the fate of wise words launched
By music on their voyage. Hail, Depart,
Arrive, Glad Welcome! Not my single wish—
Yours also wafts the white sail on its way,
Your nature too is kingly. All beside
I call pretension—no true potentate,
Whatever intermediary be crowned,
Zeus or Poseidon, where the vulgar sky
Lacks not Triballos to complete the group.
I recognize,—behind such phantom-crew,—
Necessity, Creation, Poet's Power,
Else never had I dared approach, appeal
To poetry, power, Aristophanes!

But I trust truth's inherent kingliness,
Trust who, by reason of much truth, shall reign
More or less royally—may prayer but push
His sway past limit, purge the false from true!
Nor, even so, had boldness nerved my tongue
But that the other king stands suddenly,
In all the grand investiture of death,
Bowing your knee beside my lowly head—
Equals one moment!

Now, arise and go!
Both have done homage to Euripides!
Silence pursued the words: till he broke out—

"Scarce so! This constitutes, I may believe,
Sufficient homage done by who defames
Your poet's foe, since you account me such;
But homage-proper,—pay it by defence
Of him, direct defence and not oblique,
Not by mere mild admonishment of me!"

Defence? The best, the only! I replied.
A story goes—When Sophokles, last year,
Cited before tribunal by his son
(A poet—to complete the parallel)
Was certified unsound of intellect,
And claimed as only fit for tutelage,
Since old and doating and incompetent
To carry on this world's work,—the defence
Consisted just in his reciting (calm
As the verse bore, which sets our heart a-swell
And voice a-heaving too tempestuously)
That choros-chant "The station of the steed,
Stranger! thou comest to,—Kolonos white!"
Then he looked round and all revolt was dead.

You know the one adventure of my life—
What made Euripides Balaustion's friend.
When I last saw him, as he bade farewell,
"I sang another 'Herakles,'" smiled he;
"It gained no prize: your love be prize I gain!
Take it—the tablets also where I traced
The story first with stulos pendent still—
Nay, the psalterion may complete the gift,
So, should you croon the ode bewailing Age,
Yourself shall modulate—same notes, same strings—
With the old friend who loved Balaustion once."
There they lie! When you broke our solitude,
We were about to honour him once more
By reading the consummate Tragedy.
Night is advanced; I have small mind to sleep;
May I go on, and read,—so make defence,
So test true godship? You affirm, not I,
—Beating the god, affords such test: *I* hold
That when rash hands but touch divinity,
The chains drop off, the prison-walls dispart,
And—fire—he fronts mad Pentheus! Dare we try?

Accordingly I read the perfect piece.

Zeus' Couchmate,—who of mortals knows not me,
Argive Amphitruon whom Alkaios sired
Of old, as Perseus him, I—Herakles?
My home, this Thebai where the earth-born spike
Of Sown-ones burgeoned: Ares saved from these
A handful of their seed that stocks to-day
With children's children Thebai, Kadmos built.
Of these had Kreon birth, Menoikeus' child,
King of the country,—Kreon that became
The father of this woman, Megara,
Whom, when time was, Kadmeians one and all
Pealed praise to, marriage-songs with fluted help,
While to my dwelling that grand Herakles
Bore her, his bride. But, leaving Thebes—where I
Abode perforce—this Megara and those
Her kinsmen, the desire possessed my son
Rather to dwell in Argos, that walled work,
Kuklopian city, which I fly, myself,
Because I slew Elektruon. Seeking so
To ease away my hardships and once more
Inhabit his own land, for my return
Heavy the price he pays Eurustheus there—
The letting in of light on this choked world!
Either he promised, vanquished by the goad
Of Heré, or because fate willed it thus.
The other labours—why, he toiled them through;
But for this last one—down by Tainaros,
Its mouth, to Haides' realm descended he

To drag into the light the three-shaped hound
Of Hell: whence Herakles returns no more.
Now, there 's an old-world tale, Kadmeians have,
How Dirké's husband was a Lukos once,
Holding the seven-towered city here in sway
Before they ruled the land, white-steeded pair,
The twins Amphion, Zethos, born to Zeus.
This Lukos' son,—named like his father too,
No born Kadmeian but Euboia's gift,—
Comes and kills Kreon, lords it o'er the land,
Falling upon our town sedition-sick.
To us, akin to Kreon, just that bond
Becomes the worst of evils, seemingly;
For, since my son is in the earth's abysms,
This man of valour, Lukos, lord and king,
Seeks now to slay these sons of Herakles,
And slay his wife as well,—by murder thus
Thinking to stamp out murder,—slay too me,
(If me 't is fit you count among men still,—
Useless old age) and all for fear lest these,
Grown men one day, exact due punishment
Of bloodshed and their mother's father's fate.
I therefore, since he leaves me in these domes,
The children's household guardian,—left, when earth's
Dark dread he underwent, that son of mine,—
I, with their mother, lest his boys should die,
Sit at this altar of the saviour Zeus
Which, glory of triumphant spear, he raised
Conquering—my nobly-born!—the Minuai.
Here do we guard our station, destitute
Of all things, drink, food, raiment, on bare ground
Couched side by side: sealed out of house and home
Sit we in a resourcelessness of help.
Our friends—why, some are no true friends, I see!

The rest, that are true, want the means to aid.
So operates in man adversity :
Whereof may never anybody—no,
Though half of him should really wish me well,—
Happen to taste ! a friend-test faultless, that !

MEGARA

Old man, who erst didst raze the Taphian town,
Illustriously, the army-leader, thou,
Of speared Kadmeians—how gods play men false !
I, now, missed nowise fortune in my sire,
Who, for his wealth, was boasted mighty once,
Having supreme rule,—for the love of which
Leap the long lances forth at favoured breasts,—
And having children too : and me he gave
Thy son, his house with that of Herakles
Uniting by the far-famed marriage-bed.
And now these things are dead and flown away,
While thou and I await our death, old man,
These Herakleian boys too, whom—my chicks—
I save beneath my wings like brooding bird.
But one or other falls to questioning
"O mother," cries he, "where in all the world
Is father gone to? What 's he doing? when
Will he come back?" At fault through tender
years,
They seek their sire. For me. I put them off,
Telling them stories ; at each creak of doors,
All wonder " Does he come?"—and all a-foot
Make for the fall before the parent knee.
Now then, what hope, what method of escape
Facilitatest thou ?—for, thee, old man,
I look to,—since we may not leave by stealth
The limits of the land, and guards, more strong
Than we, are at the outlets : nor in friends
Remain to us the hopes of safety more.

Therefore, whatever thy decision be,
Impart it for the common good of all!
Lest now should prove the proper time to die,
Though, being weak, we spin it out and live.

AMPHITRUON

Daughter, it scarce is easy, do one's best,
To blurt out counsel, things at such a pass.

MEGARA

You want some sorrow more, or so love life?

AMPHITRUON

I both enjoy life, and love hopes beside.

MEGARA

And I; but hope against hope—no, old man!

AMPHITRUON

In these delayings of an ill lurks cure.

MEGARA

But bitter is the meantime, and it bites.

AMPHITRUON

O there may be a run before the wind
From out these present ills, for me and thee,
Daughter, and yet may come my son, thy spouse!
But hush! and from the children take away
Their founts a-flow with tears, and talk them calm,
Steal them by stories—sad theft, all the same!
For, human troubles—they grow weary too;
Neither the wind-blasts always have their strength
Nor happy men keep happy to the end:
Since all things change—their natures part in twain;

And that man 's bravest, therefore, who hopes on,
Hopes ever : to despair is coward-like.

CHORUS

These domes that overroof,
This long-used couch, I come to, having made
A staff my prop, that song may put to proof
The swan-like power, age-whitened,—poet's aid
Of sobbed-forth dirges—words that stand aloof
From action now : such am I—just a shade
With night for all its face, a mere night-dream—
And words that tremble too : howe'er they seem,
Devoted words, I deem.

O, of a father ye unfathered ones,
O thou old man, and thou whose groaning stuns—
Unhappy mother—only us above,
Nor reaches him below in Haides' realm, thy love!
—(Faint not too soon, urge forward foot and
limb
Way-weary, nor lose courage—as some horse
Yoked to the car whose weight recoils on him
Just at the rock-ridge that concludes his course !
Take by the hand, the peplos, anyone
Whose foothold fails him, printless and fordone !
Aged, assist along me aged too,
Who,—mate with thee in toils when life was
new,
And shields and spears first made acquaintance-
ship,—
Stood by thyself and proved no bastard-slip
Of fatherland when loftiest glory grew.)—
See now, how like the sire's
Each eyeball fiercely fires !
What though ill-fortune have not left his race ?
Neither is gone the grand paternal grace !

Hellas! O what—what combatants, destroyed
In these, wilt thou one day seek—seek, and find
all void!

Pause! for I see the ruler of this land,
Lukos, now passing through the palace-gate.

LUKOS

The Herakleian couple—father, wife—
If needs I must, I question: "must" forsooth?
Being your master—all I please, I ask.
To what time do you seek to spin out life?
What hope, what help see, so as not to die?
Is it you trust the sire of these, that 's sunk
In Haides, will return? How past the pitch,
Suppose you have to die, you pile the woe—
Thou, casting, Hellas through, thy empty vaunts
As though Zeus helped thee to a god for son;
And thou, that thou wast styled our bestman's wife!
Where was the awful in his work wound up,
If he did quell and quench the marshy snake
Or the Nemeian monster whom he snared
And—says, by throttlings of his arm, he slew?
With these do you outwrestle me? Such feats
Shall save from death the sons of Herakles
Who got praise, being nought, for bravery
In wild-beast-battle, otherwise a blank?
No man to throw on left arm buckler's weight,
Not he, nor get in spear's reach! bow he bore—
True coward's-weapon: shoot first and then fly!
No bow-and-arrow proves a man is brave,
But who keeps rank,—stands, one unwinking stare
As, ploughing up, the darts come,—brave is he.
My action has no impudence, old man!
Providence, rather: for I own I slew
Kreon, this woman's sire, and have his seat.

Nowise I wish, then, to leave, these grown up,
Avengers on me, payment for my deeds.

AMPHITRUON

As to the part of Zeus in his own child,
Let Zeus defend that ! As to mine, 't is me
The care concerns to show by argument
The folly of this fellow,—Herakles,
Whom I stand up for ! since to hear thee styled—
Cowardly—that is unendurable.
First then, the infamous (for I account
Amongst the words denied to human speech,
Timidity ascribed thee, Herakles !)
This I must put from thee, with gods in proof.
Zeus' thunder I appeal to, those four steeds
Whereof he also was the charioteer
When, having shot down the earth's Giant-growth—
(Never shaft flew but found and fitted flank)
Triumph he sang in common with the gods.
The Kentaur-race, four footed insolence—
Go ask at Pholoé, vilest thou of kings,
Whom they would pick out and pronounce best man,
If not my son, "the seeming-brave," say'st thou !
But Dirphus, thy Abantid mother-town,
Question her, and she would not praise, I think !
For there's no spot, where having done some good,
Thy country thou mightst call to witness worth.
Now, that all-wise invention, archer's-gear,
Thou blamest : hear my teaching and grow sage !
A man in armour is his armour's slave,
And, mixed with rank and file that want to run,
He dies because his neighbours have lost heart.
Then, should he break his spear, no way remains
Of warding death off,—gone that body-guard,
His one and only ; while, whatever folk

Have the true bow-hand,—here 's the one main good,—
Though he have sent ten thousand shafts abroad,
Others remain wherewith the archer saves
His limbs and life, too,—stands afar and wards
Away from flesh the foe that vainly stares
Hurt by the viewless arrow, while himself
Offers no full front to those opposite,
But keeps in thorough cover : there 's the point
That 's capital in combat—damage foe,
Yet keep a safe skin—foe not out of reach
As you are ! Thus my words contrast with thine,
And such, in judging facts, our difference.
These children, now, why dost thou seek to slay ?
What have they done thee ? In a single point
I count thee wise—if, being base thyself,
Thou dread'st the progeny of nobleness.
Yet this bears hard upon us, all the same,
If we must die—because of fear in thee—
A death 't were fit thou suffer at our hands,
Thy betters, did Zeus rightly judge us all.
If therefore thou art bent on sceptre-sway,
Thyself, here—suffer us to leave the land,
Fugitives ! nothing do by violence,
Or violence thyself shalt undergo
When the gods' gale may chance to change for thee !
Alas, O land of Kadmos,—for 't is thee
I mean to close with, dealing out the due
Revilement,—in such sort dost thou defend
Herakles and his children ? Herakles
Who, coming, one to all the world, against
The Minuai, fought them and left Thebes an eye
Unblinded henceforth to front freedom with !
Neither do I praise Hellas, nor shall brook
Ever to keep in silence that I count

Towards my son, craven of cravens—her
Whom it behoved go bring the young ones here
Fire, spears, arms—in exchange for seas made safe,
And cleansings of the land—his labour's price.
But fire, spears, arms,—O children, neither Thebes
Nor Hellas has them for you ! 'T is myself,
A feeble friend, ye look to : nothing now
But a tongue's murmur, for the strength is gone
We had once, and with age are limbs a-shake
And force a-flicker ! Were I only young,
Still with the mastery o'er bone and thew,
Grasping first spear that came, the yellow locks
Of this insulter would I bloody so—
Should send him skipping o'er the Atlantic bounds
Out of my arm's reach through poltroonery !

CHOROS

Have not the really good folk starting-points
For speech to purpose,—though rare talkers they?

LUKOS

Say thou against us words thou towerest with !
I, for thy words, will deal thee blows, their due.
Go, some to Helikon, to Parnasos
Some, and the clefts there ! Bid the woodmen fell
Oak-trunks, and, when the same are brought inside
The city, pile the altar round with logs,
Then fire it, burn the bodies of them all,
That they may learn thereby, no dead man rules
The land here, but 't is I, by acts like these !
As for you, old sirs, who are set against
My judgments, you shall groan for—not alone
The Herakleian children, but the fate
Of your own house beside, when faring ill
By any chance : and you shall recollect
Slaves are you of a tyranny that 's mine !

CHOROS

O progeny of earth,—whom Ares sowed
When he laid waste the dragon's greedy jaw—
Will ye not lift the staves, right-hand supports,
And bloody this man's irreligious head?
Who, being no Kadmeian, rules,—the wretch,—
Our easy youth: an interloper too!
But not of me, at least, shalt thou enjoy
Thy lordship ever; nor my labour's fruit,—
Hand worked so hard for,—have! A curse with thee
Whence thou didst come, there go and tyrannize
For never while I live shalt thou destroy
The Herakleian children: not so deep
Hides he below ground, leaving thee their lord!
But we bear both of you in mind,—that thou,
The land's destroyer, dost possess the land,
While he who saved it, loses every right.
I play the busybody—for I serve
My dead friends when they need friends' service most?
O right-hand, how thou yearnest to snatch spear
And serve indeed! in weakness dies the wish,
Or I had stayed thee calling me a slave,
And nobly drawn my breath at home in Thebes
Where thou exultest!—city that 's insane,
Sick through sedition and bad government,
Else never had she gained for master—thee!

MEGARA

Old friends, I praise you: since a righteous wrath
For friend's sake well becomes a friend. But no!
On our account in anger with your lord,
Suffer no injury! Hear my advice,
Amphitruon, if I seem to speak aright.
O yes, I love my children! how not love

What I brought forth, what toiled for? and to
die—
Sad I esteem too; still, the fated way
Who stiffens him against, that man I count
Poor creature; us, who are of other mood,
Since we must die, behoves us meet our death
Not burnt to cinders, giving foes the laugh—
To me, worse ill than dying, that! We owe
Our houses many a brave deed, now to pay.
Thee, indeed, gloriously men estimate
For spear-work, so that unendurable
Were it that thou shouldst die a death of shame.
And for my glorious husband, where wants he
A witness that he would not save his boys
If touched in their good fame thereby? Since birth
Bears ill with baseness done for children's sake,
My husband needs must be my pattern here.
See now thy hope—how much I count thereon!
Thou thinkest that thy son will come to light:
And, of the dead, who came from Haides back?
But we with talk this man might mollify:
Never! Of all foes, fly the foolish one!
Wise, well-bred people, make concession to!
Sooner you meet respect by speaking soft.
Already it was in my mind—perchance
We might beg off these children's banishment;
But even that is sad, involving them
In safety, ay—and piteous poverty!
Since the host's visage for the flying friend
Has, only one day, the sweet look, 't is said.
Dare with us death, which waits thee, dared or no!
We call on thine ancestral worth, old man!
For who outlabours what the gods appoint
Shows energy, but energy gone mad.
Since what must—none e'er makes what must
not be.

CHOROS

Had anyone, while yet my arms were strong,
Been scorning thee, he easily had ceased.
But we are nought, now; thine henceforth to see—
Amphitruon, how to push aside these fates!

AMPHITRUON

Nor cowardice nor a desire of life
Stops me from dying: but I seek to save
My son his children. Vain! I set my heart,
It seems, upon impossibility.
See, it is ready for the sword, this throat
To pierce, divide, dash down from precipice!
But one grace grant us, king, we supplicate!
Slay me and this unhappy one before
The children, lest we see them—impious sight!—
Gasping the soul forth, calling all the while
On mother and on father's father! Else,
Do as thy heart inclines thee! No resource
Have we from death, and we resign ourselves.

MEGARA

And I too supplicate: add grace to grace,
And, though but one man, doubly serve us both!
Let me bestow adornment of the dead
Upon these children! Throw the palace wide!
For now we are shut out. Thence these shall share
At least so much of wealth was once their sire's!

LUKOS

These things shall be. Withdraw the bolts, I bid
My servants! Enter and adorn yourselves!
I grudge no peploi; but when these ye wind
About your bodies,—that adornment done,—
Then I shall come and give you to the grave.

MEGARA

O children, follow this unhappy foot,
Your mother's, into your ancestral home,
Where others have the power, are lords in truth,
Although the empty name is left us yet!

AMPHITRUON

O Zeus, in vain I had thee marriage-mate,
In vain I called thee father of my child!
Thou wast less friendly far than thou didst seem.
I, the mere man, o'ermatch in virtue thee
The mighty god: for I have not betrayed
The Herakleian children,—whereas thou
Hadst wit enough to come clandestinely
Into the chamber, take what no man gave,
Another's place; and when it comes to help
Thy loved ones, there thou lackest wit indeed!
Thou art some stupid god or born unjust.

CHOROS

Even a dirge, can Phoibos suit
In song to music jubilant
For all its sorrow: making shoot
His golden plectron o'er the lute,
Melodious ministrant.
And I, too, am of mind to raise,
Despite the imminence of doom,
A song of joy, outpour my praise
To him—what is it rumour says?—
Whether—now buried in the ghostly gloom
Below ground,—he was child of Zeus indeed,
Or mere Amphitruon's mortal seed—
To him I weave the wreath of song, his labour's meed.
For, is my hero perished in the feat?

The virtues of brave toils, in death complete,
These save the dead in song,—their glory-garland meet!
First, then, he made the wood
Of Zeus a solitude,
Slaying its lion-tenant; and he spread
The tawniness behind—his yellow head
Enmuffled by the brute's, backed by that grin of dread.
The mountain-roving savage Kentaur-race
He strewed with deadly bow about their place,
Slaying with winged shafts: Peneios knew,
Beauteously-eddying, and the long tracts too
Of pasture trampled fruitless, and as well
Those desolated haunts Mount Pelion under,
And, grassy up to Homolé, each dell
Whence, having filled their hands with pine-tree plunder,
Horse-like was wont to prance from, and subdue
The land of Thessaly, that bestial crew.
The golden-headed spot-back'd stag he slew,
That robber of the rustics: glorified
Therewith the goddess who in hunter's pride
Slaughters the game along Oinoé's side.
And, yoked abreast, he brought the chariot-breed
To pace submissive to the bit, each steed
That in the bloody cribs of Diomede
Champed and, unbridled, hurried down that gore
For grain, exultant the dread feast before—
Of man's flesh: hideous feeders they of yore!
All as he crossed the Hebros' silver-flow
Accomplished he such labour, toiling so
For Mukenaian tyrant; ay, and more—
He crossed the Melian shore
And, by the sources of Amauros, shot

To death that strangers'-pest
Kuknos, who dwelt in Amphanaia : not
Of fame for good to guest !
And next, to the melodious maids he came,
Inside the Hesperian court-yard : hand must aim
At plucking gold fruit from the appled leaves,
Now he had killed the dragon, backed like flame,
Who guards the unapproachable he weaves
Himself all round, one spire about the same.
And into those sea-troughs of ocean dived
The hero, and for mortals calm contrived,
Whatever oars should follow in his wake.
And under heaven's mid-seat his hands thrust he,
At home with Atlas : and, for valour's sake,
Held the gods up their star-faced mansionry.
Also, the rider-host of Amazons
About Maiotis many-streamed, he went
To conquer through the billowy Euxine once,
Having collected what an armament
Of friends from Hellas, all on conquest bent
Of that gold-garnished cloak, dread girdle-chase !
So Hellas gained the girl's barbarian grace
And at Mukenai saves the trophy still—
Go wonder there, who will !

And the ten thousand-headed hound
Of many a murder, the Lernaian snake
He burned out, head by head, and cast around
His darts a poison thence,—darts soon to slake
Their rage in that three-bodied herdsman's gore
Of Erutheia. Many a running more
He made for triumph and felicity,
And, last of toils, to Haides, never dry
Of tears, he sailed : and there he, luckless, ends
His life completely, nor returns again.

The house and home are desolate of friends,
And where the children's life-path leads them, plain
I see,—no step retraceable, no god
Availing, and no law to help the lost!
The oar of Charon marks their period,
Waits to end all. Thy hands, these roofs accost!—
To thee, though absent, look their uttermost!

But if in youth and strength I flourished still,
Still shook the spear in fight, did power match will
In these Kadmeian co-mates of my age,
They would,—and I,—when warfare was to wage,
Stand by these children; but I am bereft
Of youth now, lone of that good genius left!

But hist, desist! for here come these,—
Draped as the dead go, under and over,—
Children long since,—now hard to discover,—
Of the once so potent Herakles!
And the loved wife dragging, in one tether
About her feet, the boys together;
And the hero's aged sire comes last!
Unhappy that I am! Of tears which rise,—
How am I all unable to hold fast,
Longer, the aged fountains of these eyes!

MEGARA

Be it so! Who is priest, who butcher here
Of these ill-fated ones, or stops the breath
Of me, the miserable? Ready, see,
The sacrifice—to lead where Haides lives!
O children, we are led—no lovely team
Of corpses—age, youth, motherhood, all mixed!
O sad fate of myself and these my sons
Whom with these eyes I look at, this last time!
I, indeed, bore you: but for enemies

I brought you up to be a laughing-stock,
Matter for merriment, destruction-stuff!
Woe 's me!
Strangely indeed my hopes have struck me down
From what I used to hope about you once—
The expectation from your father's talk!
For thee, now, thy dead sire dealt Argos to:
Thou wast to have Eurustheus' house one day,
And rule Pelasgia where the fine fruits grow;
And, for a stole of state, he wrapped about
Thy head with that the lion-monster bore,
That which himself went wearing armour-wise.
And thou wast King of Thebes—such chariots there!
Those plains I had for portion—all for thee,
As thou hadst coaxed them out of who gave birth
To thee, his boy: and into thy right hand
He thrust the guardian-club of Daidalos,—
Poor guardian proves the gift that plays thee false!
And upon thee he promised to bestow
Oichalia—what, with those far-shooting shafts,
He ravaged once; and so, since three you were,
With threefold kingdoms did he build you up
To very towers, your father,—proud enough
Prognosticating, from your manliness
In boyhood, what the manhood's self would be.
For my part, I was picking out for you
Brides, suiting each with his alliance—this
From Athens, this from Sparté, this from Thebes—
Whence, suited—as stern-cables steady ship—
You might have hold on life gods bless. All gone!
Fortune turns round and gives us—you, the Fates
Instead of brides—me, tears for nuptial baths,
Unhappy in my hoping! And the sire
Of your sire—he prepares the marriage-feast
Befitting Haides who plays father now—

Bitter relationship! Oh me! which first—
Which last of you shall I to bosom fold?
To whom shall I fit close, his mouth to mine?
Of whom shall I lay hold and ne'er let go?
How would I gather, like the brown-winged bee,
The groans from all, and, gathered into one,
Give them you back again, a crowded tear!
Dearest, if any voice be heard of men
Dungeoned in Haides, thee—to thee I speak!
Here is thy father dying, and thy boys!
And I too perish, famed as fortunate
By mortals once, through thee! Assist them!
Come!
But come! though just a shade, appear to me!
For, coming, thy ghost-grandeur would suffice,
Such cowards are they in thy presence, these
Who kill thy children now thy back is turned!

AMPHITRUON

Ay, daughter, bid the powers below assist!
But I will rather, raising hand to heaven,
Call thee to help, O Zeus, if thy intent
Be, to these children, helpful anyway,
Since soon thou wilt be valueless enough!
And yet thou hast been called and called; in vain
I labour: for we needs must die, it seems.
Well, aged brothers—life 's a little thing!
Such as it is, then, pass life pleasantly
From day to night, nor once grieve all the while!
Since Time concerns him not about our hopes,—
To save them,—but his own work done, flies off.
Witness myself, looked up to among men,
Doing noteworthy deeds: when here comes fate
Lifts me away, like feather skyward borne,
In one day! Riches then and glory,—whom
These are found constant to, I know not. Friends,

Farewell! the man who loved you all so much,
Now, this last time, my mates, ye look upon!

MEGARA

Ha!
O father, do I see my dearest? Speak!

AMPHITRUON

No more than thou canst, daughter—dumb like thee!

MEGARA

Is this he whom we heard was under ground?

AMPHITRUON

Unless at least some dream in day we see!

MEGARA

What do I say? what dreams insanely view?
This is no other than thy son, old sire!
Here children! hang to these paternal robes,
Quick, haste, hold hard on him, since here 's your true
Zeus that can save—and every whit as well!

HERAKLES

O hail, my palace, my hearth's propula,—
How glad I see thee as I come to light!
Ha, what means this? My children I behold
Before the house in garments of the grave,
Chapleted, and, amid a crowd of men,
My very wife—my father weeping too,
Whatever the misfortune! Come, best take
My station nearer these and learn it all!
Wife, what new sorrow has approached our home?

MEGARA

O dearest! light flashed on thy father now!
Art thou come? art thou saved and dost thou fall
On friends in their supreme extremity?

HERAKLES

How say'st thou? Father! what 's the trouble here?

MEGARA

Undone are we!—but thou, old man, forgive
If first I snatch what thou shouldst say to him!
For somehow womanhood wakes pity more.
Here are my children killed and I undone!

HERAKLES

Apollon, with what preludes speech begins!

MEGARA

Dead are my brothers and old father too.

HERAKLES

How say'st thou?—doing what?—by spear-stroke whence?

MEGARA

Lukos destroyed them—the land's noble king!

HERAKLES

Met them in arms? or through the land's disease?

MEGARA

Sedition: and he sways seven-gated Thebes.

HERAKLES

Why then came fear on the old man and thee?

MEGARA

He meant to kill thy father, me, our boys.

HERAKLES

How say'st thou? Fearing what from orphanage?

MEGARA

Lest they should some day pay back Kreon's death.

HERAKLES

And why trick out the boys corpse-fashion thus?

MEGARA

These wraps of death we have already donned.

HERAKLES

And you had died through violence? Woe 's me!

MEGARA

Left bare of friends: and thou wast dead, we heard.

HERAKLES

And whence came on you this faintheartedness?

MEGARA

The heralds of Eurustheus brought the news.

HERAKLES

And why was it you left my house and hearth?

MEGARA

Forced thence; thy father—from his very couch!

HERAKLES

And no shame at insulting the old man?

MEGARA

Shame, truly ! no near neighbours *he* and Shame !

HERAKLES

And so much, in my absence, lacked I friends ?

MEGARA

Friends,—are there any to a luckless man ?

HERAKLES

The Minuai-war I waged,—they spat forth these?

MEGARA

Friendless,—again I tell thee,—is ill-luck.

HERAKLES

Will not you cast these hell-wraps from your hair
And look on light again, and with your eyes
Taste the sweet change from nether dark to day ?
While I—for now there needs my handiwork—
First I shall go, demolish the abodes
Of these new lordships ; next hew off the head
Accurst and toss it for the dogs to trail.
Then, such of the Kadmeians as I find
Were craven though they owed me gratitude,—
Some I intend to handle with this club
Renowned for conquest ; and with winged shafts
Scatter the others, fill Ismenos full
With bloody corpses,—Dirké's flow so white
Shall be incarnadined. For, whom, I pray,
Behoves me rather help than wife and child
And aged father ? Farewell, "Labours" mine !
Vainly I wrought them : my true work lay here !
My business is to die defending these,—
If for their father's sake they meant to die.

Or how shall we call brave the battling it
With snake and lion, as Eurustheus bade,
If yet I must not labour death away
From my own children? "Conquering Herakles"
Folk will not call me as they used, I think!
The right thing is for parents to assist
Children, old age, the partner of the couch.

AMPHITRUON

True, son! thy duty is—be friend to friends
And foe to foes: yet—no more haste than needs!

HERAKLES

Why, father, what is over hasty here?

AMPHITRUON

Many a pauper,—seeming to be rich,
As the word goes,—the king calls partisan.
Such made a riot, ruined Thebes to rob
Their neighbour: for, what good they had at home
Was spent and gone—flew off through idleness.
You came to trouble Thebes, they saw: since seen,
Beware lest, raising foes, a multitude,
You stumble where you apprehend no harm.

HERAKLES

If all Thebes saw me, not a whit care I.
But seeing as I did a certain bird
Not in the lucky seats, I knew some woe
Was fallen upon the house: so, purposely,
By stealth I made my way into the land.

AMPHITRUON

And now, advancing, hail the hearth with praise
And give the ancestral home thine eye to see!
For he himself will come, thy wife and sons

To drag-forth—slaughter—slay me too,—this king!
But, here remaining, all succeeds with thee—
Gain lost by no false step. So, this thy town
Disturb not, son, ere thou right matters here!

HERAKLES

Thus will I do, for thou say'st well; my home
Let me first enter! Since at the due time
Returning from the unsunned depths where dwells
Haides' wife Koré, let me not affront
Those gods beneath my roof I first should hail!

AMPHITRUON

For didst thou really visit Haides, son?

HERAKLES

Ay—dragged to light, too, his three-headed beast.

AMPHITRUON

By fight didst conquer, or through Koré's gift?

HERAKLES

Fight: well for me, I saw the Orgies first!

AMPHITRUON

And is he in Eurustheus' house, the brute?

HERAKLES

Chthonia's grove, Hermion's city, hold him now.

AMPHITRUON

Does not Eurustheus know thee back on earth?

HERAKLES

No: I would come first and see matters here.

AMPHITRUON

But how wast thou below ground such a time?

HERAKLES

I stopped, from Haides, bringing Theseus up.

AMPHITRUON

And where is he?—bound o'er the plain for home?

HERAKLES

Gone glad to Athens—Haides' fugitive!
But, up, boys! follow father into house!
There 's a far better going-in for you
Truly, than going-out was! Nay, take heart,
And let the eyes no longer run and run!
And thou, O wife, my own, collect thy soul
Nor tremble now! Leave grasping, all of you,
My garments! I 'm not winged, nor fly from friends!
Ah,—
No letting go for these, who all the more
Hang to my garments! Did you foot indeed
The razor's edge? Why, then I 'll carry them—
Take with my hands these small craft up, and tow
Just as a ship would. There! don't fear I shirk
My children's service! this way, men are men,
No difference! best and worst, they love their boys
After one fashion: wealth they differ in—
Some have it, others not; but each and all
Combine to form the children-loving race.

CHOROS

Youth is a pleasant burthen to me;
But age on my head, more heavily

Than the crags of Aitna, weighs and weighs,
And darkening cloaks the lids and intercepts the rays.
Never be mine the preference
Of an Asian empire's wealth, nor yet
Of a house all gold, to youth, to youth
That 's beauty, whatever the gods dispense !
Whether in wealth we joy, or fret
Paupers,—of all God's gifts most beautiful, in truth !

But miserable murderous age I hate !
Let it go to wreck, the waves adown,
Nor ever by rights plague tower or town
Where mortals bide, but still elate
With wings, on ether, precipitate,
Wander them round—nor wait !

But if the gods, to man's degree,
Had wit and wisdom, they would bring
Mankind a twofold youth, to be
Their virtue's sign-mark, all should see,
In those with whom life's winter thus grew spring.
For when they died, into the sun once more
Would they have traversed twice life's racecourse o'er ;
While ignobility had simply run
Existence through, nor second life begun.
And so might we discern both bad and good
As surely as the starry multitude
Is numbered by the sailors, one and one.
But now the gods by no apparent line
Limit the worthy and the base define ;
Only, a certain period rounds, and so
Brings man more wealth,—but youthful vigour, no !

Well! I am not to pause
Mingling together—wine and wine in cup—
The Graces with the Muses up—
Most dulcet marriage: loosed from music's laws,
No life for me!
But where the wreaths abound, there ever may
I be!
And still, an aged bard, I shout Mnemosuné—
Still chant of Herakles the triumph-chant,
Companioned by the seven-stringed tortoise-shell
And Libuan flute, and Bromios' self as well,
God of the grape, with man participant!
Not yet will we arrest their glad advance—
The Muses who so long have led me forth to
dance!
A paian—hymn the Delian girls indeed,
Weaving a beauteous measure in and out
His temple-gates, Latona's goodly seed;
And paians—I too, these thy domes about,
From these grey cheeks, my king, will swan-like
shout—
Old songster! Ay, in song it starts off brave—
"Zeus' son is he!" and yet, such grace of birth
Surpassing far, to man his labours gave
Existence, one calm flow without a wave,
Having destroyed the beasts, the terrors of the
earth.

LUKOS

From out the house Amphitruon comes—in
time!
For 't is a long while now since ye bedecked
Your bodies with the dead-folk's finery.
But quick! the boys and wife of Herakles—
Bid them appear outside this house, keep pact
To die, and need no bidding but your own!

AMPHITRUON

King ! you press hard on me sore-pressed enough,
And give me scorn—beside my dead ones here.
Meet in such matters were it, though you reign,
To temper zeal with moderation. Since
You do impose on us the need to die—
Needs must we love our lot, obey your will.

LUKOS

Where 's Megara, then ? Alkmené's grandsons,
where ?

AMPHITRUON

She, I think,—as one figures from outside,—

LUKOS

Well, this same thinking,—what affords its ground ?

AMPHITRUON

—Sits suppliant on the holy altar-steps,—

LUKOS

Idly indeed a suppliant to save life !

AMPHITRUON

—And calls on her dead husband, vainly too !

LUKOS

For he 's not come, nor ever will arrive.

AMPHITRUON

Never—at least, if no god raise him up.

LUKOS

Go to her, and conduct her from the house !

AMPHITRUON

I should partake the murder, doing that.

LUKOS

We,—since thou hast a scruple in the case,—
Outside of fears, we shall march forth these lads,
Mother and all. Here, follow me, my folk—
And gladly so remove what stops our toils!

AMPHITRUON

Thou—go then! March where needs must! What remains—
Perhaps concerns another. Doing ill,
Expect some ill be done thee!
Ha, old friends!
On he strides beautifully! in the toils
O' the net, where swords spring forth, will he be fast—
Minded to kill his neighbours—the arch-knave!
I go, too—I must see the falling corpse!
For he has sweets to give—a dying man,
Your foe, that pays the price of deeds he did.

CHOROS

Troubles are over! He the great king once
Turns the point, tends for Haides, goal of life!
O justice, and the gods' back-flowing fate!

AMPHITRUON

Thou art come, late indeed, where death pays crime—
These insults heaped on better than thyself!

CHOROS

Joy gives this outburst to my tears! Again

Come round those deeds, his doing, which of old
He never dreamed himself was to endure—
King of the country! But enough, old man!
Indoors, now, let us see how matters stand—
If somebody be faring as I wish!

LUKOS

Ah me—me!

CHOROS

This strikes the keynote—music to my mind,
Merry i' the household! Death takes up the tune!
The king gives voice, groans murder's prelude well!

LUKOS

O, all the land of Kadmos! slain by guile!

CHOROS

Ay, for who slew first? Paying back thy due,
Resign thee! make, for deeds done, mere amends!
Who was it grazed the gods through lawlessness—
Mortal himself, threw up his fool's-conceit
Against the blessed heavenly ones—as though
Gods had no power? Old friends, the impious man
Exists not any more! The house is mute.
Turn we to song and dance! For, those I love,
Those I wish well to, well fare they, to wish!

Dances, dances and banqueting
To Thebes, the sacred city through,
Are a care! for, change and change
Of tears to laughter, old to new,
Our lays, glad birth, they bring, they bring!
He is gone and past, the mighty king!
And the old one reigns, returned—O strange!
From the Acherontian harbour too!

Advent of hope, beyond thought's widest range!
To the gods, the gods, are crimes a care,
And they watch our virtue, well aware
That gold and that prosperity drive man
Out of his mind—those charioteers who hale
Might-without-right behind them: face who can
Fortune's reverse which time prepares, nor quail?
—He who evades law and in lawlessness
Delights him,—he has broken down his trust—
The chariot, riches haled—now blackening in the dust!

Ismenos, go thou garlanded!
Break into dance, ye ways, the polished bed
O' the seven-gated city! Dirké, thou
Fair-flowing, with the Asopiad sisters all,
Leave your sire's stream, attend the festival
Of Herakles, one choir of nymphs, sing triumph now!
O woody rock of Puthios and each home
O' the Helikonian Muses, ye shall come
With joyous shouting to my walls, my town
Where saw the light that Spartan race, those "Sown,"
Brazen-shield-bearing chiefs, whereof the band
With children's children renovates our land,
To Thebes a sacred light!
O combination of the marriage rite—
Bed of the mortal-born and Zeus, who couched
Beside the nymph of Perseus' progeny!
For credible, past hope, becomes to me
That nuptial story long ago avouched,
O Zeus! and time has turned the dark to bright,
And made one blaze of truth the Herakleidan might—
His, who emerged from earth's pavilion, left
Plouton's abode, the nether palace-cleft.

Thou wast the lord that nature gave me—not
That baseness born and bred—my king, by lot!
—Baseness made plain to all, who now regard
The match of sword with sword in fight,—
If to the gods the Just and Right
Still pleasing be, still claim the palm's award.

Horror!
Are we come to the self-same passion of fear,
Old friends?—such a phantasm fronts me here
Visible over the palace-roof!
In flight, in flight, the laggard limb
Bestir! and haste aloof
From that on the roof there—grand and grim!
O Paian, king!
Be thou my safeguard from the woeful thing!

IRIS

Courage, old men! beholding here—Night's birth—
Madness, and me the handmaid of the gods,
Iris: since to your town we come, no plague—
Wage war against the house of but one man
From Zeus and from Alkmené sprung, they say.
Now, till he made an end of bitter toils,
Fate kept him safe, nor did his father Zeus
Let us once hurt him, Heré nor myself.
But, since he has toiled through Eurustheus' task,
Heré desires to fix fresh blood on him—
Slaying his children: I desire it too.

Up then, collecting the unsoftened heart,
Unwedded virgin of black Night! Drive, drag
Frenzy upon the man here—whirls of brain
Big with child-murder, while his feet leap gay!
Let go the bloody cable its whole length!
So that,—when o'er the Acherousian ford

He has sent floating, by self-homicide,
His beautiful boy-garland,—he may know
First, Heré's anger, what it is to him,
And then learn mine. The gods are vile indeed
And mortal matters vast, if he 'scape free!

MADNESS

Certes, from well-born sire and mother too
Had I my birth, whose blood is Night's and Heaven's;
But here 's my glory,—not to grudge the good!
Nor love I raids against the friends of man.
I wish, then, to persuade,—before I see
You stumbling, you and Heré! trust my words!
This man, the house of whom ye hound me to,
Is not unfamed on earth nor gods among;
Since, having quelled waste land and savage sea,
He alone raised again the falling rights
Of gods—gone ruinous through impious men.
Desire no mighty mischief, I advise!

IRIS

Give thou no thought to Heré's faulty schemes!

MADNESS

Changing her step from faulty to fault-free!

IRIS

Not to be wise, did Zeus' wife send thee here.

MADNESS

Sun, thee I cite to witness—doing what I loathe to do!
But since indeed to Heré and thyself I must subserve,

And follow you quick, with a whizz, as the hounds
a-hunt with the huntsman,
—Go I will! and neither the sea, as it groans
with its waves so furiously,
Nor earthquake, no, nor the bolt of thunder
gasping out heaven's labour-throe,
Shall cover the ground as I, at a bound, rush into
the bosom of Herakles!
And home I scatter, and house I batter,
Having first of all made the children fall,—
And he who felled them is never to know
He gave birth to each child that received the blow,
Till the Madness, I am, have let him go!

Ha, behold! already he rocks his head—he is off
from the starting-place!
Not a word, as he rolls his frightful orbs, from
their sockets wrenched in the ghastly race!
And the breathings of him he tempers and times
no more than a bull in act to toss,
And hideously he bellows invoking the Keres,
daughters of Tartaros.
Ay, and I soon will dance thee madder, and pipe
thee quite out of thy mind with fear!
So, up with the famous foot, thou Iris, march to
Olumpos, leave me here!
Me and mine, who now combine, in the dreadful
shape no mortal sees,
And now are about to pass, from without, inside
of the home of Herakles!

CHOROS

Ototoi,—groan!
Away is mown
Thy flower, Zeus' offspring, City!
Unhappy Hellas, who dost cast (the pity!)

Who worked thee all the good,
Away from thee,—destroyest in a mood
Of madness him, to death whom pipings dance!
There goes she, in her chariot,—groans, her brood,—
And gives her team the goad, as though adrift
For doom, Night's Gorgon, Madness, she whose glance
Turns man to marble! with what hissings lift
Their hundred heads the snakes, her head's inheritance!
Quick has the god changed fortune: through their sire
Quick will the children, that he saved, expire!
O miserable me! O Zeus! thy child—
Childless himself—soon vengeance, hunger-wild,
Craving for punishment, will lay how low—
Loaded with many a woe!

O palace-roofs! your courts about,
A measure begins all unrejoiced
By the tympanies and the thyrsos hoist
Of the Bromian revel-rout!
O ye domes! and the measure proceeds
For blood, not such as the cluster bleeds
Of the Dionusian pouring-out!

Break forth, fly, children! fatal this—
Fatal the lay that is piped, I wis!
Ay, for he hunts a children-chase—
Never shall Madness lead her revel
And leave no trace in the dwelling-place!
Ai ai, because of the evil!
Ai ai, the old man—how I groan
For the father, and not the father alone!
She who was nurse of his children,—small
Her gain that they ever were born at all!

See! See!
A whirlwind shakes hither and thither
The house—the roof falls in together!
Ha, ha, what dost thou, son of Zeus?
A trouble of Tartaros broke loose,
Such as once Pallas on the Titan thundered,
Thou sendest on thy domes, roof-shattered and wall-sundered!

MESSENGER

O bodies white with age!—

CHOROS

What cry, to me—
What, dost thou call with?

MESSENGER

There 's a curse indoors.

CHOROS

I shall not bring a prophet: you suffice.

MESSENGER

Dead are the children.

CHOROS

Ai ai!

MESSENGER

Groan! for, groans
Suit well the subject. Dire the children's death,
Dire too the parent's hands that dealt the fate.
No one could tell worse woe than we have borne.

CHOROS

How dost thou that same curse—curse, cause for groan—
The father's on the children, make appear?

Tell in what matter they were hurled from heaven
Against the house—these evils; and recount
The children's hapless fate, O Messenger!

MESSENGER

The victims were before the hearth of Zeus,
A household-expiation: since the king
O' the country, Herakles had killed and cast
From out the dwelling; and a beauteous choir
Of boys stood by his sire, too, and his wife.
And now the basket had been carried round
The altar in a circle, and we used
The consecrated speech. Alkmené's son,—
Just as he was about, in his right hand,
To bear the torch, that he might dip into
The cleansing-water,—came to a stand-still;
And, as their father yet delayed, his boys
Had their eyes on him. But he was himself
No longer: lost in rollings of the eyes;
Outthrusting eyes—their very roots—like blood!
Froth he dropped down his bushy-bearded cheek,
And said—together with a madman's laugh—
"Father! why sacrifice, before I slay
Eurustheus? why have twice the lustral fire,
And double pains, when 't is permitted me
To end, with one good hand-sweep, matters here?
Then,—when I hither bring Eurustheus' head,—
Then for these just slain, wash hands once for all!
Now,—cast drink-offerings forth, throw baskets down!
Who gives me bow and arrows, who my club?
I go to that Mukenai. One must match
Crowbars and mattocks, so that—those sunk stones
The Kuklops squared with picks and plumb-line red—
I, with my bent steel, may o'ertumble town."

Which said, he goes and—with no car to have—
Affirms he has one ! mounts the chariot-board,
And strikes, as having really goad in hand !
And two ways laughed the servants—laugh with awe ;
And one said, as each met the other's stare,
"Playing us boys' tricks ? or is master mad ?"
But up he climbs, and down along the roof,
And, dropping into the men's place, maintains
He 's come to Nisos city, when he 's come
Only inside his own house ! then reclines
On floor, for couch, and, as arrived indeed,
Makes himself supper ; goes through some brief stay,
Then says he 's traversing the forest-flats
Of Isthmos ; thereupon lays body bare
Of bucklings, and begins a contest with
—No one ! and is proclaimed the conqueror—
He by himself—having called out to hear
—Nobody ! Then, if you will take his word,
Blaring against Eurustheus horribly,
He 's at Mukenai. But his father laid
Hold of the strong hand and addressed him thus :
"O son, what ails thee ? Of what sort is this
Extravagance ? Has not some murder-craze,
Bred of those corpses thou didst just despatch,
Danced thee drunk ?" But he,—taking him to crouch,
Eurustheus' sire, that apprehensive touched
His hand, a suppliant,—pushes him aside,
Gets ready quiver, and bends bow against
His children—thinking them Eurustheus' boys
He means to slay. They, horrified with fear,
Rushed here and there,—this child, into the robes
O' the wretched mother—this, beneath the shade
O' the column,—and this other, like a bird,

Cowered at the altar-foot. The mother shrieks
"Parent—what dost thou?—kill thy children?" So
Shriek the old sire and crowd of servitors.
But he, outwinding him, as round about
The column ran the boy,—a horrid whirl
O' the lathe his foot described!—stands opposite,
Strikes through the liver; and supine the boy
Bedews the stone shafts, breathing out his life.
But "Victory!" he shouted—boasted thus:
"Well, this one nestling of Eurustheus—dead—
Falls by me, pays back the paternal hate!"
Then bends bow on another who was crouched
At base of altar—overlooked, he thought—
And now prevents him, falls at father's knee,
Throwing up hand to beard and cheek above.
"O dearest!" cries he; "father, kill me not!
Yours I am—your boy: not Eurustheus' boy
You kill now!" But he, rolling the wild eye
Of Gorgon,—as the boy stood all too close
For deadly bowshot,—mimicry of smith
Who batters red-hot iron,—hand o'er head
Heaving his club, on the boy's yellow hair
Hurls it and breaks the bone. This second caught,—
He goes, would slay the third, one sacrifice
He and the couple; but, beforehand here,
The miserable mother catches up,
Carries him inside house and bars the gate.
Then he, as he were at those Kuklops' work,
Digs at, heaves doors up, wrenches doorposts out,
Lays wife and child low with the selfsame shaft.
And this done, at the old man's death he drives;
But there came, as it seemed to us who saw,
A statue—Pallas with the crested head,
Swinging her spear—and threw a stone which smote
Herakles' breast and stayed his slaughter-rage,
And sent him safe to sleep. He falls to ground—

Striking against the column with his back—
Column which, with the falling of the roof,
Broken in two, lay by the altar-base.
And we, foot-free now from our several flights,
Along with the old man, we fastened bonds
Of rope-noose to the column, so that he,
Ceasing from sleep, might not go adding deeds
To deeds done. And he sleeps a sleep, poor wretch,
No gift of any god! since he has slain
Children and wife. For me, I do not know
What mortal has more misery to bear.

CHOROS

A murder there was which Argolis
Holds in remembrance, Hellas through,
As, at that time, best and famousest:
Of those, the daughters of Danaos slew.
A murder indeed was that! but this
Outstrips it, straight to the goal has pressed.
I am able to speak of a murder done
To the hapless Zeus-born offspring, too—
Prokné's son, who had but one—
Or a sacrifice to the Muses, say
Rather, who Itus sing alway,
Her single child. But thou, the sire
Of children three—O thou consuming fire!—
In one outrageous fate hast made them all expire.
And this outrageous fate—
What groan, or wail, or deadmen's dirge,
Or choric dance of Haides shall I urge
The Muse to celebrate?

Woe! woe! behold!
The portalled palace lies unrolled,
This way and that way, each prodigious fold!

Alas for me! these children, see,
Stretched, hapless group, before their father—he
The all-unhappy, who lies sleeping out
The murder of his sons, a dreadful sleep!
And bonds, see, all about,—
Rope-tangle, ties and tether,—these
Tightenings around the body of Herakles
To the stone columns of the house made fast!

But—like a bird that grieves
For callow nestlings some rude hand bereaves—
See, here, a bitter journey overpast,
The old man—all too late—is here at last!

AMPHITRUON

Silently, silently, aged Kadmeians!
Will ye not suffer my son, diffused
Yonder, to slide from his sorrows in sleep?

CHOROS

And thee, old man, do I, groaning, weep,
And the children too, and the head there—
used
Of old to the wreaths and paians!

AMPHITRUON

Farther away! Nor beat the breast,
Nor wail aloud, nor rouse from rest
The slumberer—asleep, so best!

CHOROS

Ah me—what a slaughter!

AMPHITRUON

Refrain—refrain!
Ye will prove my perdition.

CHOROS

Unlike water,
Bloodshed rises from earth again.

AMPHITRUON

Do I bid you bate your breath, in vain—
Ye elders? Lament in a softer strain!
Lest he rouse himself, burst every chain,
And bury the city in ravage—bray
Father and house to dust away!

CHOROS

I cannot forbear—I cannot forbear!

AMPHITRUON

Hush! I will learn his breathings: there!
I will lay my ears close.

CHOROS

What, he sleeps?

AMPHITRUON

Ay,—sleeps! A horror of slumber keeps
The man who has piled
On wife and child
Death and death, as he shot them down
With clang o' the bow.

CHOROS

Wail—

AMPHITRUON

Even so!

CHOROS

—The fate of the children—

AMPHITRUON

Triple woe !

CHOROS

—Old man, the fate of thy son !

AMPHITRUON

Hush, hush ! Have done !
He is turning about !
He is breaking out !
Away ! I steal
And my body conceal,
Before he arouse,
In the depths of the house.

CHOROS

Courage ! The Night
Maintains her right
On the lids of thy son there, sealed from sight !

AMPHITRUON

See, see ! To leave the light
And, wretch that I am, bear one last ill,
I do not avoid ; but if he kill
Me his own father, and devise
Beyond the present miseries
A misery more ghastly still—
And to haunt him, over and above
Those here who, as they used to love,
Now hate him, what if he have with these
My murder, the worst of Erinues ?

CHOROS

Then was the time to die, for thee,
When ready to wreak in the full degree

Vengeance on those
Thy consort's foes
Who murdered her brothers! glad, life's close,
With the Taphioi down,
And sacked their town
Clustered about with a wash of sea!

AMPHITRUON

To flight—to flight!
Away from the house, troop off, old men!
Save yourselves out of the maniac's sight!
He is rousing himself right up: and then,
Murder on murder heaping anew,
He will revel in blood your city through!

CHOROS

O Zeus, why hast, with such unmeasured hate,
Hated thy son, whelmed in this sea of woes?

HERAKLES

Ha,—
In breath indeed I am—see things I ought—
Æther, and earth, and these the sunbeam-shafts!
But then—some billow and strange whirl of sense
I have fallen into! and breathings hot I breathe—
Smoked upwards, not the steady work from lungs.
See now! Whybound,—at moorings like a ship,—
About my young breast and young arm, to this
Stone piece of carved work broke in half, do I
Sit, have my rest in corpses' neighbourhood?
Strewn on the ground are winged darts, and bow
Which played my brother-shieldman, held in hand,—
Guarded my side, and got my guardianship!
I cannot have gone back to Haides—twice
Begun Eurustheus' race I ended thence?

But I nor see the Sisupheian stone,
Nor Plouton, nor Demeter's sceptred maid!
I am struck witless sure! Where can I be?
Ho there! what friend of mine is near or far—
Some one to cure me of bewilderment?
For nought familiar do I recognize.

AMPHITRUON

Old friends, shall I go close to these my woes?

CHOROS

Ay, and let me too,—nor desert your ills!

HERAKLES

Father, why weepest thou, and buriest up
Thine eyes, aloof so from thy much-loved son?

AMPHITRUON

O child!—for, faring badly, mine thou art!

HERAKLES

Do I fare somehow ill, that tears should flow?

AMPHITRUON

Ill,—would cause any god who bore, to groan!

HERAKLES

That 's boasting, truly! still, you state no hap.

AMPHITRUON

For, thyself seest—if in thy wits again.

HERAKLES

Heyday! How riddlingly that hint returns!

AMPHITRUON

Well, I am trying—art thou sane and sound!

HERAKLES

Say if thou lay'st aught strange to my life's charge!

AMPHITRUON

If thou no more art Haides-drunk,—I tell!

HERAKLES

I bring to mind no drunkenness of soul.

AMPHITRUON

Shall I unbind my son, old men, or what?

HERAKLES

And who was binder, tell!—not *that*, my deed!

AMPHITRUON

Mind that much of misfortune—pass the rest!

HERAKLES

Enough! from silence, I nor learn nor wish.

AMPHITRUON

O Zeus, dost witness here throned Heré's work?

HERAKLES

But have I had to bear aught hostile thence?

AMPHITRUON

Let be the goddess—bury thine own guilt!

HERAKLES

Undone! What is the sorrow thou wilt say?

AMPHITRUON

Look! See the ruins of thy children here!

HERAKLES

Ah me! What sight do wretched I behold?

AMPHITRUON

Unfair fight, son, this fight thou fastenedst
On thine own children!

HERAKLES

What fight? Who slew these?

AMPHITRUON

Thou and thy bow, and who of gods was cause.

HERAKLES

How say'st? What did I? Ill-announcing sire!

AMPHITRUON

—Go mad! Thou askest a sad clearing up.

HERAKLES

And am I also murderer of my wife?

AMPHITRUON

All the work here was just one hand's work—thine!

HERAKLES

Ai ai—for groans encompass me—a cloud!

AMPHITRUON

For these deeds' sake do I begroan thy fate.

HERAKLES

Did I break up my house or dance it down?

AMPHITRUON

I know just one thing—all 's a woe with thee.

HERAKLES

But where did the craze catch me? where destroy?

AMPHITRUON

When thou didst cleanse hands at the altar-flame.

HERAKLES

Ah me! why is it then I save my life—
Proved murderer of my dearest ones, my boys?
Shall not I rush to the rock-level's leap,
Or, darting sword through breast and all, become
My children's blood-avenger? or, this flesh
Burning away with fire, so thrust away
The infamy, which waits me there, from life?

Ah but,—a hindrance to my purposed death,
Theseus arrives, my friend and kinsman, here!
Eyes will be on me! my child-murder-plague
In evidence before friends loved so much!
O me, what shall I do? Where, taking wing
Or gliding underground, shall I seek out
A solitariness from misery?
I will pull night upon my muffled head!
Let this wretch here content him with his curse
Of blood: I would pollute no innocents.

THESEUS

I come,—with others who await beside
Asopos' stream, the armed Athenian youth,—
Bring thy son, old man, spear's fight-fellowship!
For a bruit reached the Erechtheidai's town
That, having seized the sceptre of this realm,
Lukos prepares you battle-violence.

So, paying good back,—Herakles began,
Saving me down there,—I have come, old man,
If aught, of my hand or my friends', you want.
What 's here? Why all these corpses on the ground?
Am I perhaps behindhand—come too late
For newer ill? Who killed these children now?
Whose wife was she, this woman I behold?
Boys, at least, take no stand in reach of spear!
Some other woe than war, I chance upon.

AMPHITRUON

O thou, who sway'st the olive-bearing height!—

THESEUS

Why hail'st thou me with woeful prelude thus?

AMPHITRUON

Dire sufferings have we suffered from the gods.

THESEUS

These boys,—who are they thou art weeping o'er?

AMPHITRUON

He gave them birth, indeed, my hapless son!
Begot, but killed them—dared their bloody death.

THESEUS

Speak no such horror!

AMPHITRUON

Would I might obey!

THESEUS

O teller of dread tidings!

AMPHITRUON

Lost are we—
Lost—flown away from life!

THESEUS

What sayest thou? 4820
What did he?

AMPHITRUON

Erring through a frenzy-fit,
He did all, with the arrows dipt in dye
Of hundred-headed Hudra.

THESEUS

Heré's strife!
But who is this among the dead, old man?

AMPHITRUON

Mine, mine, this progeny—the labour-plagued, 4825
Who went with gods once to Phlegruia's plain,
And in the giant-slaying war bore shield.

THESEUS

Woe—woe! What man was born mischanceful
thus!

AMPHITRUON

Thou couldst not know another mortal man
Toil-weary, more outworn by wanderings. 4830

THESEUS

And why i' the peploi hides he his sad head?

AMPHITRUON

Not daring meet thine eye, thy friendliness
And kinship,—nor that children's-blood about.

THESEUS

But *I* come to who shared my woe with me!
Uncover him!

AMPHITRUON

O child, put from thine eyes
The peplos, throw it off, show face to sun!
Woe's weight well matched contends with tears
in thee.
I supplicate thee, falling at thy cheek
And knee and hand, and shedding this old tear!
O son, remit the savage lion's mood,
Since to a bloody, an unholy race
Art thou led forth, if thou be resolute
To go on adding ill to ill, my child!

THESEUS

Let me speak! Thee, who sittest—seated woe—
I call upon to show thy friends thine eye!
For there 's no darkness has a cloud so black
May hide thy misery thus absolute.
Why, waving hand, dost sign me—murder 's done?
Lest a pollution strike me, from thy speech?
Nought care I to—with thee, at least—fare ill:
For I had joy once! *Then*,—soul rises to,—
When thou didst save me from the dead to light!
Friends' gratitude that tastes old age, I loathe,
And him who likes to share when things look fine,
But, sail along with friends in trouble—no!
Arise, uncover thine unhappy head!
Look on us! Every man of the right race
Bears what, at least, the gods inflict, nor shrinks.

HERAKLES

Theseus, hast seen this match—my boys with me?

THESEUS

I heard of, now I see the ills thou sign'st.

HERAKLES

Why then hast thou displayed my head to sun?

THESEUS

Why? mortals bring no plague on aught divine.

HERAKLES

Fly, O unhappy, this my impious plague!

THESEUS

No plague of vengeance flits to friends from friends.

HERAKLES

I praise thee. But I helped thee,—that is truth.

THESEUS

And I, advantaged then, now pity thee.

HERAKLES

—The pitiable,—my children's murderer!

THESEUS

I mourn for thy sake, in this altered lot.

HERAKLES

Hast thou found others in still greater woe?

THESEUS

Thou, from earth, touchest heaven, one huge distress!

HERAKLES

Accordingly, I am prepared to die.

THESEUS

Think'st thou thy threats at all import the gods?

HERAKLES

Gods please themselves: to gods I give their like.

THESEUS

Shut thy mouth, lest big words bring bigger woe!

HERAKLES

I am full fraught with ills—no stowing more!

THESEUS

Thou wilt do—what, then? Whither moody borne?

HERAKLES

Dying, I go below earth whence I came.

THESEUS

Thou hast used words of—what man turns up first!

HERAKLES

While thou, being outside sorrow, schoolest me.

THESEUS

The much-enduring Herakles talks thus?—

HERAKLES

Not the so much-enduring: measure 's past.

THESEUS

—Mainstay to mortals, and their mighty friend?

HERAKLES

They nowise profit me: but Heré rules.

THESEUS

Hellas forbids thou shouldst ineptly die.

HERAKLES

But hear, then, how I strive by arguments
Against thy teachings! I will ope thee out
My life—past, present—as unliveable.
First, I was born of this man, who had slain
His mother's aged sire, and, sullied so,
Married Alkmené, she who gave me birth.
Now, when the basis of a family
Is not laid right, what follows needs must fall;
And Zeus, whoever Zeus is, formed me foe
To Heré (take not thou offence, old man!
Since father, in Zeus' stead, account I thee),
And, while I was at suck yet, frightful snakes
She introduced among my swaddling-clothes,—
That bedfellow of Zeus!—to end me so.
But when I gained the youthful garb of flesh,
The labours I endured—what need to tell?
What lions ever, or three-bodied brutes,
Tuphons or giants, or the four-legg'd swarms
Of Kentaur-battle, did not I end out?
And that hound, headed all about with heads
Which cropped up twice, the Hudra, having slain—
I both went through a myriad other toils
In full drove, and arrived among the dead
To convoy, as Eurustheus bade, to light
Haides' three-headed dog and doorkeeper.
But then I,—wretch,—dared this last labour—
see!
Slew my sons, keystone-coped my house with ills.
To such a strait I come! nor my dear Thebes
Dare I inhabit: and, suppose I stay?
Into what fane or festival of friends

Am I to go? My curse scarce courts accost!
Shall I seek Argos? How, if fled from home?
But say—I hurry to some other town!
And there they eye me, as notorious now,—
Kept by sharp tongue-taunts under lock and key—
"Is not this he, Zeus' son, who murdered once
Children and wife? Let him go rot elsewhere!"
To any man renowned as happy once,
Reverses are a grave thing; but to whom
Evil is old acquaintance there 's no hurt
To speak of, he and misery are twins.
To this degree of woe I think to come:
For earth will utter voice forbidding me
To touch the ground, and sea—to pierce the wave,
The river-springs—to drink, and I shall play
Ixion's part quite out, the chained and wheeled!
And best of all will be, if so I 'scape
Sight from one man of those Hellenes,—once
I lived among, felicitous and rich!
Why ought I then to live? What gain accrues
From good-for-nothing, wicked life I lead?
In fine, let Zeus' brave consort dance and sing,
Stamp foot, the Olumpian Zeus' own sandal-trick!
What she has willed, that brings her will to pass—
The foremost man of Hellas pedestalled,
Up, over, and down whirling! Who would pray
To such a goddess?—that, begrudging Zeus
Because he loved a woman, ruins me—
Lover of Hellas, faultless of the wrong!

THESEUS

This strife is from no other of the gods
Than Zeus' wife; rightly apprehend, as well,
Why, to no death—thou meditatest now—
I would persuade thee, but to bear thy woes!
None, none of mortals boasts a fate unmixed,

Nor gods—if poets' teaching be not false.
Have not they joined in wedlock against law
With one another? not, for sake of rule,
Branded their sires in bondage? Yet they house,
All the same, in Olumpos, carry heads
High there, notorious sinners though they be!
What wilt thou say, then, if thou, mortal-born,
Bearest outrageously fate gods endure?
Leave Thebes, now, pay obedience to the law
And follow me to Pallas' citadel!
There, when thy hands are purified from stain,
House will I give thee, and goods shared alike.
What gifts I hold too from the citizens
For saving twice seven children, when I slew
The Knosian bull, these also give I thee.
And everywhere about the land are plots
Apportioned me: these, named by thine own name,
Shall be henceforward styled by all men—thine,
Thy life long; but at death, when Haides-bound,
All Athens shall uphold the honoured one
With sacrifices, and huge marble heaps:
For that 's a fair crown our Hellenes grant
Their people—glory, should they help the brave!
And I repay thee back this grace for thine
That saved me, now that thou art lorn of friends—
Since, when the gods give honour, friends may flit:
For, a god's help suffices, if he please.

HERAKLES

Ah me, these words are foreign to my woes!
I neither fancy gods love lawless beds,
Nor, that with chains they bind each other's hands,
Have I judged worthy faith, at any time;
Nor shall I be persuaded—one is born
His fellows' master! since God stands in need—

If he is really God—of nought at all.
These are the poets' pitiful conceits !
But this it was I pondered, though woe-whelmed—
"Take heed lest thou be taxed with cowardice
Somehow in leaving thus the light of day !"
For whoso cannot make a stand against
These same misfortunes, neither could withstand
A mere man's dart, oppose death, strength to strength.
Therefore unto thy city I will go
And have the grace of thy ten thousand gifts.
There ! I have tasted of ten thousand toils
As truly—never waived a single one,
Nor let these runnings drop from out my eyes :
Nor ever thought it would have come to this—
That I from out my eyes do drop tears. Well !
At present, as it seems, one bows to fate.
So be it ! Old man, thou seest my exile—
Seest, too, me—my children's murderer !
These give thou to the tomb, and deck the dead,
Doing them honour with thy tears—since me
Law does not sanction. Propping on her breast,
And giving them into their mother's arms,
—Re-institute the sad community
Which I, unhappy, brought to nothingness—
Not by my will ! And, when earth hides the dead,
Live in this city !—sad, but, all the same,
Force thy soul to bear woe along with me !
O children, who begat and gave you birth—
Your father—has destroyed you ! nought you gain
By those fair deeds of mine I laid you up,
As by main-force I laboured glory out
To give you,—that fine gift of fatherhood !
And thee, too, O my poor one, I destroyed,
Not rendering like for like, as when thou kept'st
My marriage-bed inviolate,—those long

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

Household-seclusions draining to the dregs
Inside my house! O me, my wife, my boys—
And—O myself, how, miserably moved,
Am I disyoked now from both boys and wife!
O bitter those delights of kisses now—
And bitter these my weapons' fellowship!
For I am doubtful whether shall I keep
Or cast away these arrows which will clang
Ever such words out, as they knock my side—
"Us—thou didst murder wife and children with!
Us—child-destroyers—still thou keepest thine!"
Ha, shall I bear them in my arms, then? What
Say for excuse? Yet, naked of my darts
Wherewith I did my bravest, Hellas through,
Throwing myself beneath foot to my foes,
Shall I die basely? No! relinquishment
Of these must never be,—companions once,
We sorrowfully must observe the pact.
In just one thing, co-operate with me
Thy sad friend, Theseus! Go along with him
To Argos, and in concert get arranged
The price my due for bringing there the Hound!
O land of Kadmos, Theban people all,
Shear off your locks, lament one wide lament,
Go to my children's grave and, in one strain,
Lament the whole of us—my dead and me—
Since all together are fordone and lost,
Smitten by Heré's single stroke of fate!

THESEUS

Rise up now from thy dead ones! Tears enough,
Poor friend!

HERAKLES

I cannot: for my limbs are fixed.

THESEUS

Ay : even these strong men fate overthrows.

HERAKLES

Woe !
Here might I grow a stone, nor mind woes more !

THESEUS

Cease ! Give thy hand to friendly helpmate now !

HERAKLES

Nay, but I wipe off blood upon thy robes.

THESEUS

Squeeze out and spare no drop ! I take it all !

HERAKLES

Of sons bereaved, I have thee like my son.

THESEUS

Give to my neck thy hand ! 't is I will lead.

HERAKLES

Yoke-fellows friendly—one heart-broken, though !
O father, such a man we need for friend !

AMPHITRUON

Certes the land that bred him boasts good sons.

HERAKLES

Turn me round, Theseus—to behold my boys !

THESEUS

What ? will the having such a love-charm soothe ?

HERAKLES

I want it; and to press my father's breast.

AMPHITRUON

See here, O son! for, what I love thou seek'st.

THESEUS

Strange! Of thy labours no more memory?

HERAKLES

All those were less than these, those ills I bore.

THESEUS

Who sees thee grow a woman,—will not praise.

HERAKLES

I live low to thee? Not so once, I think.

THESEUS

Too low by far! "Famed Herakles"—where 's he?

HERAKLES

Down amid evils, of what kind wast *thou?*

THESEUS

As far as courage—least of all mankind!

HERAKLES

How say'st, then, *I* in evils shrink to nought?

THESEUS

Forward!

HERAKLES

Farewell, old father!

AMPHITRUON

Thou too, son!

HERAKLES

Bury the boys as I enjoined!

AMPHITRUON

And *me*—
Who will be found to bury now, my child?

HERAKLES

Myself.

AMPHITRUON

When, coming?

HERAKLES

When thy task is done.

AMPHITRUON

How?

HERAKLES

I will have thee carried forth from Thebes
To Athens. But bear in the children, earth
Is burthened by! Myself,—who with these shames
Have cast away my house,—a ruined hulk,
I follow—trailed by Theseus—on my way;
And whoso rather would have wealth and strength
Than good friends, reasons foolishly therein.

CHOROS

And we depart, with sorrow at heart,
Sobs that increase with tears that start;
The greatest of all our friends of yore
We have lost for evermore!

When the long silence ended,—"Our best friend—
Lost, our best friend!" he muttered musingly.
Then, "Lachares the sculptor" (half aloud)
"Sinned he or sinned he not? 'Outrageous sin!'
Shuddered our elders, 'Pallas should be clothed:
He carved her naked.' 'But more beautiful!'
Answers this generation: 'Wisdom formed
For love not fear!' And there the statue stands,
Entraps the eye severer art repels.
Moreover, Pallas wields the thunderbolt
Yet has not struck the artist all this while.
Pheidias and Aischulos? Euripides
And Lachares? But youth will have its way.
The ripe man ought to be as old as young—
As young as old. I too have youth at need.
Much may be said for stripping wisdom bare.

"And who 's 'our best friend'? You play kottabos;
Here 's the last mode of playing. Take a sphere
With orifices at due interval,
Through topmost one of which, a throw adroit
Sends wine from cup, clean passage, from outside
To where, in hollow midst, a manikin
Suspended ever bobs with head erect
Right underneath whatever hole 's a-top
When you set orb a-rolling: plumb, he gets
Ever this benediction of the splash.
An other-fashioned orb presents him fixed:
Of all the outlets, he fronts only one,
And only when that one,—and rare the chance,—
Comes uppermost, does he turn upward too:
He can't turn all sides with the turning orb.
Inside this sphere of life,—all objects, sense
And soul perceive,—Euripides hangs fixed,
Gets knowledge through the single aperture
Of High and Right: with visage fronting these

He waits the wine thence ere he operate,
Work in the world and write a tragedy.
When that hole happens to revolve to point,
In drops the knowledge, waiting meets reward.
But, duly in rotation, Low and Wrong—
When these enjoy the moment's altitude,
His heels are found just where his head should be!
No knowledge that way! *I* am moveable,—
To slightest shift of orb make prompt response,
Face Low and Wrong and Weak and all the rest,
And still drink knowledge, wine-drenched every turn,—
Equally favoured by their opposites.
Little and Bad exist, are natural:
Then let me know them, and be twice as great
As he who only knows one phase of life!
So doubly shall I prove 'best friend of man,'
If I report the whole truth—Vice, perceived
While he shut eyes to all but Virtue there.
Man 's made of both: and both must be of use
To somebody: if not to him, to me.
While, as to your imaginary Third
Who, stationed (by mechanics past my guess)
So as to take in every side at once,
And not successively,—may reconcile
The High and Low in tragi-comic verse,—
He shall be hailed superior to us both
When born—in the Tin-islands! Meantime, here
In bright Athenai, I contest the claim,
Call myself Iostephanos' 'best friend,'
Who took my own course, worked as I descried
Ordainment, stuck to my first faculty.

"For listen! There 's no failure breaks the heart,
Whate'er be man's endeavour in this world,
Like the rash poet's when he—nowise fails

By poetizing badly,—Zeus or makes
Or mars a man, so—at it, merrily!
But when,—made man,—much like myself,—equipt
For such and such achievement,—rash he turns
Out of the straight path, bent on snatch of feat
From—who 's the appointed fellow born thereto,—
Crows take him!—in your Kassiterides?
Half-doing his work, leaving mine untouched,
That were the failure. Here I stand, heart-whole,
No Thamuris!

"Well thought of, Thamuris!
Has zeal, pray, for 'best friend' Euripides
Allowed you to observe the honour done
His elder rival, in our Poikilé?
You don't know? Once and only once, trod stage,
Sang and touched lyre in person, in his youth,
Our Sophokles,—youth, beauty, dedicate
To Thamuris who named the tragedy.
The voice of him was weak; face, limbs and lyre,
These were worth saving: Thamuris stands yet
Perfect as painting helps in such a case.
At least you know the story, for 'best friend'
Enriched his 'Rhesos' from the Blind Bard's store;
So haste and see the work, and lay to heart
What it was struck me when I eyed the piece!
Here stands a poet punished for rash strife
With Powers above his power, who see with sight
Beyond his vision, sing accordingly
A song, which he must needs dare emulate.
Poet, remain the man nor ape the Muse!

"But—lend me the psalterton! Nay, for once—
Once let my hand fall where the other's lay!

I see it, just as I were Sophokles,
That sunrise and combustion of the east!"

And then he sang—are these unlike the words?

Thamuris marching,—lyre and song of Thrace—
(Perpend the first, the worst of woes that were
Allotted lyre and song, ye poet-race!)

Thamuris from Oichalia, feasted there
By kingly Eurutos of late, now bound
For Dorion at the uprise broad and bare
Of Mount Pangaios (ore with earth enwound
Glittered beneath his footstep)—marching gay
And glad, Thessalia through, came, robed and crowned,

From triumph on to triumph, mid a ray
Of early morn,—came, saw and knew the spot
Assigned him for his worst of woes, that day.

Balura—happier while its name was not—
Met him, but nowise menaced; slipt aside,
Obsequious river, to pursue its lot

Of solacing the valley—say, some wide
Thick busy human cluster, house and home,
Embanked for peace, or thrift that thanks the tide.

Thamuris, marching, laughed "Each flake of foam"
(As sparklingly the ripple raced him by)
"Mocks slower clouds adrift in the blue dome!"

For Autumn was the season; red the sky
Held morn's conclusive signet of the sun
To break the mists up, bid them blaze and die.

Morn had the mastery as, one by one
All pomps produced themselves along the tract
From earth's far ending to near heaven begun.

Was there a ravaged tree? it laughed compact
With gold, a leaf-ball crisp, high-brandished now,
Tempting to onset frost which late attacked.

Was there a wizened shrub, a starveling bough,
A fleecy thistle filched from by the wind,
A weed, Pan's trampling hoof would disallow?

Each, with a glory and a rapture twined
About it, joined the rush of air and light
And force: the world was of one joyous mind.

Say not the birds flew! they forebore their right—
Swam, revelling onward in the roll of things.
Say not the beasts' mirth bounded! that was flight—

How could the creatures leap, no lift of wings?
Such earth's community of purpose, such
The ease of earth's fulfilled imaginings,—

So did the near and far appear to touch
I' the moment's transport,—that an interchange
Of function, far with near, seemed scarce too much;

And had the rooted plant aspired to range
With the snake's license, while the insect yearned
To glow fixed as the flower, it were not strange—

No more than if the fluttery tree-top turned
To actual music, sang itself aloft;
Or if the wind, impassioned chantress, earned

The right to soar embodied in some soft
Fine form all fit for cloud-companionship,
And, blissful, once touch beauty chased so oft.

Thamuris, marching, let no fancy slip
Born of the fiery transport ; lyre and song
Were his, to smite with hand and launch from lip—

Peerless recorded, since the list grew long
Of poets (saith Homeros) free to stand
Pedestalled mid the Muses' temple-throng,

A statued service, laurelled, lyre in hand,
(Ay, for we see them)—Thamuris of Thrace
Predominating foremost of the band.

Therefore the morn-ray that enriched his face,
If it gave lambent chill, took flame again
From flush of pride ; he saw, he knew the place.

What wind arrived with all the rhythms from plain,
Hill, dale, and that rough wildwood interspersed?
Compounding these to one consummate strain,

It reached him, music ; but his own outburst
Of victory concluded the account,
And that grew song which was mere music erst.

" Be my Parnassos, thou Pangaian mount!
And turn thee, river, nameless hitherto!
Famed shalt thou vie with famed Pieria's fount!

" Here I await the end of this ado :
Which wins—Earth's poet or the Heavenly Muse." . . .

But song broke up in laughter. "Tell the rest
Who may! *I* have not spurned the common life,
Nor vaunted mine a lyre to match the Muse
Who sings for gods, not men! Accordingly,
I shall not decorate her vestibule—
Mute marble, blind the eyes and quenched the brain,
Loose in the hand a bright, a broken lyre!
—Not Thamuris but Aristophanes!

"There! I have sung content back to myself,
And started subject for a play beside.
My next performance shall content you both.
Did 'Prelude-Battle' maul 'best friend' too much?
Then 'Main-Fight' be my next song, fairness' self!
Its subject—Contest for the Tragic Crown.
Ay, you shall hear none else but Aischulos
Lay down the law of Tragedy, and prove
'Best friend' a stray-away,—no praise denied
His manifold deservings, never fear—
Nor word more of the old fun! Death defends.
Sound admonition has its due effect.
Oh, you have uttered weighty words, believe!
Such as shall bear abundant fruit, next year,
In judgment, regular, legitimate.
Let Bacchos' self preside in person! Ay—
For there 's a buzz about those 'Bacchanals'
Rumour attributes to your great and dead
For final effort: just the prodigy
Great dead men leave, to lay survivors low!
—Until we make acquaintance with our fate
And find, fate's worst done, we, the same, survive
Perchance to honour more the patron-god,
Fitlier inaugurate a festal year.
Now that the cloud has broken, sky laughs blue,
Earth blossoms youthfully. Athenai breathes.
After a twenty-six years' wintry blank

Struck from her life,—war-madness, one long swoon,
She wakes up: Arginousai bids good cheer.
We have disposed of Kallikratidas;
Once more will Sparté sue for terms,—who knows?
Cede Dekeleia, as the rumour runs:
Terms which Athenai, of right mind again,
Accepts—she can no other. Peace declared,
Have my long labours borne their fruit or no?
Grinned coarse buffoonery so oft in vain?
Enough—it simply saved you. Saved ones, praise
Theoria's beauty and Opora's breadth!
Nor, when Peace realizes promised bliss,
Forget the Bald Bard, Envy! but go burst
As the cup goes round and the cates abound,
Collops of hare with roast spinks rare!
Confess my pipings, dancings, posings served
A purpose: guttlings, guzzlings, had their use!
Say whether light Muse, Rosy-finger-tips,
Or 'best friend's' heavy-hand, Melpomené,
Touched lyre to purpose, played Amphion's part,
And built Athenai to the skies once more!
Farewell, brave couple! Next year, welcome me!"

No doubt, in what he said that night, sincere!
One story he referred to, false or fact,
Was not without adaptability.
They do say—Lais the Corinthian once
Chancing to see Euripides (who paced
Composing in a garden, tablet-book
In left hand, with appended stulos prompt)
"Answer me," she began, "O Poet,—this!
What didst intend by writing in thy play
Go hang, thou filthy doer?" Struck on heap,
Euripides, at the audacious speech—

"Well now," quoth he, "thyself art just the one
I should imagine fit for deeds of filth!"
She laughingly retorted his own line
"What 's filth,—unless who does it, thinks it so?"

So might he doubtless think. "Farewell," said we.

And he was gone, lost in the morning-grey,
Rose-streaked and gold to eastward. Did we dream?
Could the poor twelve-hours hold this argument
We render durable from fugitive,
As duly at each sunset's droop of sail,
Delay of oar, submission to sea-might,
I still remember, you as duly dint
Remembrance, with the punctual rapid style,
Into—what calm cold page!

Thus soul escapes
From eloquence made captive: thus mere words
—Ah, would the lifeless body stay! But no:
Change upon change till,—who may recognize
What did soul service, in the dusty heap?
What energy of Aristophanes
Inflames the wreck Balaustion saves to show?
Ashes be evidence how fire—with smoke—
All night went lamping on! But morn must rise.
The poet—I shall say—burned up and, blank
Smouldered this ash, now white and cold enough.

Nay, Euthukles! for best, though mine it be,
Comes yet. Write on, write ever, wrong no word!

Add, first,—he gone, if jollity went too,
Some of the graver mood, which mixed and marred,
Departed likewise. Sight of narrow scope

Has this meek consolation : neither ills
We dread, nor joys we dare anticipate,
Perform to promise. Each soul sows a seed—
Euripides and Aristophanes ;
Seed bears crop, scarce within our little lives ;
But germinates,—perhaps enough to judge,—
Next year ?

Whereas, next year brought harvest time !
For, next year came, and went not, but is now,
Still now, while you and I are bound for Rhodes
That 's all but reached—and harvest has it brought,
Dire as the homicidal dragon-crop.
Sophokles had dismissal ere it dawned,
Happy as ever ; though men mournfully
Plausive,—when only soul could triumph now,
And Iophon produced his father's play,—
Crowned the consummate song where Oidipous
Dared the descent mid earthquake-thundering,
And hardly Theseus' hands availed to guard
Eyes from the horror, as their grove disgorged
Its dread ones, while each daughter sank to ground.

Then Aristophanes, on heel of that,
Triumphant also, followed with his "Frogs :"
Produced at next Lenaia,—three months since,—
The promised Main-Fight, loyal, license-free !
As if the poet, primed with Thasian juice,
(Himself swore—wine that conquers every kind
For long abiding in the head) could fix
Thenceforward any object in its truth,
Through eyeballs bathed by mere Castalian dew,
Nor miss the borrowed medium,—vinous drop
That colours all to the right crimson pitch
When mirth grows mockery, censure takes the tinge
Of malice !

All was Aristophanes :
There blazed the glory, there shot black the shame.
Ay, Bacchos did stand forth, the Tragic God
In person ! and when duly dragged through mire,—
Having lied, filched, played fool, proved coward, flung
The boys their dose of fit indecency,
And finally got trounced to heart's content,
At his own feast, in his own theatre
(—Oh never fear ! 'T was consecrated sport,
Exact tradition, warranted no whit
Offensive to instructed taste,—indeed,
Essential to Athenai's liberty,
Could the poor stranger understand !) why, then—
He was pronounced the rarely-qualified
To rate the work, adjust the claims to worth,
Of Aischulos (of whom, in other mood,
This same appreciative poet pleased
To say " He 's all one stiff and gluey piece
Of back of swine's neck ! ")—and of Chatterbox
Who, "twisting words like wool," usurped his seat
In Plouton's realm : " the arch-rogue, liar, scamp
That lives by snatching-up of altar-orts,"
—Who failed to recognize Euripides ?

Then came a contest for supremacy—
Crammed full of genius, wit and fun and freak.
No spice of undue spite to spoil the dish
Of all sorts,—for the Mystics matched the Frogs
In poetry, no Seiren sang so sweet !—
Till, pressed into the service (how dispense
With Phaps-Elaphion and free foot-display ?)
The Muse of dead Euripides danced frank,
Rattled her bits of tile, made all too plain
How baby-work like " Herakles " had birth !

Last, Bacchos,—candidly disclaiming brains
Able to follow finer argument,—
Confessed himself much moved by three main facts:
First,—if you stick a "Lost his flask of oil"
At pause of period, you perplex the sense—
Were it the Elegy for Marathon!
Next, if you weigh two verses, "car"—the word,
Will outweigh "club"—the word, in each packed line!
And—last, worst fact of all!—in rivalry
The younger poet dared to improvise
Laudation less distinct of—Triphales?
(Nay, that served when ourself abused the youth!)
Pheidippides? (nor that 's appropriate now!)
Then,—Alkibiades, our city's hope,
Since times change and we Comics should change too!
These three main facts, well weighed, drew judgment down,
Conclusively assigned the wretch his fate—
"Fate due" admonished the sage Mystic choir,
"To sitting, prate-apace, with Sokrates,
Neglecting music and each tragic aid!"
—All wound-up by a wish "We soon may cease
From certain griefs, and warfare, worst of them!"
—Since, deaf to Comedy's persistent voice,
War still raged, still was like to rage. In vain
Had Sparté cried once more "But grant us Peace
We give you Dekeleia back!" Too shrewd
Was Kleophon to let escape, forsooth,
The enemy—at final gasp, besides!

So, Aristophanes obtained the prize,
And so Athenai felt she had a friend
Far better than her "best friend," lost last year;

And so, such fame had "Frogs" that, when came round
This present year, those Frogs croaked gay again
At the great Feast, Elaphebolion-month.
Only—there happened Aigispotamoi!

And, in the midst of the frog-merriment,
Plump o' the sudden, pounces stern King Stork
On the light-hearted people of the marsh!
Spartan Lusandros swooped precipitate,
Ended Athenai, rowed her sacred bay
With oars which brought a hundred triremes back
Captive!

And first word of the conqueror
Was "Down with those Long Walls, Peiraios' pride!
Destroy, yourselves, your bulwarks! Peace needs none!"
And "We obey" they shuddered in their dream.

But, at next quick imposure of decree—
"No longer democratic government!
Henceforth such oligarchy as ourselves
Please to appoint you!"—then the horror stung
Dreamers awake; they started up a-stare
At the half-helot captain and his crew
—Spartans, "men used to let their hair grow long,
To fast, be dirty, and just—Socratize"—
Whose word was "Trample on Themistokles!"
So, as the way is with much misery,
The heads swam, hands refused their office, hearts
Sunk as they stood in stupor. "Wreck the Walls?
Ruin Peiraios?—with our Pallas armed

For interference?—Herakles apprised,
And Theseus hasting? Lay the Long Walls low?"

Three days they stood, stared,—stonier than their walls.

Whereupon, sleep who might, Lusandros woke:
Saw the prostration of his enemy,
Utter and absolute beyond belief,
Past hope of hatred even. I surmise
He also probably saw fade in fume
Certain fears, bred of Bakis-prophecy,
Nor apprehended any more that gods
And heroes,—fire, must glow forth, guard the ground
Where prone, by sober day-dawn, corpse-like lay
Powerless Athenai, late predominant
Lady of Hellas,—Sparté's slave-prize now!
Where should a menace lurk in those slack limbs?
What was to move his circumspection? Why
Demolish just Peiraios?

"Stay!" bade he:
"Already promise-breakers? True to type,
Athenians! past and present and to come—
The fickle and the false! No stone dislodged,
No implement applied, yet three days' grace
Expire! Forbearance is no longer-lived.
By breaking promise, terms of peace you break—
Too gently framed for falsehood, fickleness!
All must be reconsidered—yours the fault!"

Wherewith, he called a council of allies.
Pent-up resentment used its privilege,—
Outburst at ending: this the summed result.

"Because we would avenge no transient wrong
But an eternity of insolence,
Aggression,—folly, no disasters mend,
Pride, no reverses teach humility,—
Because too plainly were all punishment,
Such as comports with less obdurate crime,
Evadable by falsehood, fickleness—
Experience proves the true Athenian type,—
Therefore, 't is need we dig deep down into
The root of evil; lop nor bole nor branch.
Look up, look round and see, on every side,
What nurtured the rank tree to noisome fruit!
We who live hutted (so they laugh) not housed,
Build barns for temples, prize mud-monuments,
Nor show the sneering stranger aught but—men,—
Spartans take insult of Athenians just
Because they boast Akropolis to mount,
And Propulaia to make entry by,
Through a mad maze of marble arrogance
Such as you see—such as let none see more!
Abolish the detested luxury!
Leave not one stone upon another, raze
Athenai to the rock! Let hill and plain
Become a waste, a grassy pasture-ground
Where sheep may wander, grazing goats depend
From shapeless crags once columns! so at last
Shall peace inhabit there, and peace enough."

Whereon, a shout approved "Such peace bestow!"

Then did a Man of Phokis rise—O heart!
Rise—when no bolt of Zeus disparted sky,
No omen-bird from Pallas scared the crew,
Rise—when mere human argument could stem
No foam-fringe of the passion surging fierce,
Baffle no wrath-wave that o'er barrier broke—

Who was the Man of Phokis rose and flung
A flower i' the way of that fierce foot's advance,
Which — stop for? — nay, had stamped down
sword's assault!
Could it be *He* stayed Sparté with the snatch
"Daughter of Agamemnon, late my liege,
Elektra, palaced once, a visitant
To thy poor rustic dwelling, now I come?"

Ay, facing fury of revenge, and lust
Of hate, and malice moaning to appease
Hunger on prey presumptuous, prostrate now—
Full in the hideous faces—last resource,
You flung that choric flower, my Euthukles!

And see, as through some pinhole, should the wind
Wedgingly pierce but once, in with a rush
Hurries the whole wild weather, rends to rags
The weak sail stretched against the outside storm—
So did the power of that triumphant play
Pour in, and oversweep the assembled foe!
Triumphant play, wherein our poet first
Dared bring the grandeur of the Tragic Two
Down to the level of our common life,
Close to the beating of our common heart.
Elektra? 'T was Athenai, Sparté's ice
Thawed to, while that sad portraiture appealed—
Agamemnonian lady, lost by fault
Of her own kindred, cast from house and home,
Despoiled of all the brave inheritance,
Dowered humbly as befits a herdsman's mate,
Partaker of his cottage, clothed in rags,
Patient performer of the poorest chares,
Yet mindful, all the while, of glory past
When she walked darling of Mukenai, dear
Beyond Orestes to the King of Men!

So, because Greeks are Greeks, though Sparté's brood,
And hearts are hearts, though in Lusandros' breast,
And poetry is power, and Euthukles
Had faith therein to, full-face, fling the same—
Sudden, the ice-thaw! The assembled foe,
Heaving and swaying with strange friendliness,
Cried "Reverence Elektra!"—cried "Abstain
Like that chaste Herdsman, nor dare violate
The sanctity of such reverse! Let stand
Athenai!"

Mindful of that story's close,
Perchance, and how,—when he, the Herdsman chaste,
Needs apprehend no break of tranquil sleep,—
All in due time, a stranger, dark, disguised,
Knocks at the door: with searching glance, notes keen,
Knows quick, through mean attire and disrespect,
The ravaged princess! Ay, right on, the clutch
Of guiding retribution has in charge
The author of the outrage! While one hand,
Elektra's, pulls the door behind, made fast
On fate,—the other strains, prepared to push
The victim-queen, should she make frightened pause
Before that serpentining blood which steals
Out of the darkness where, a pace beyond,
Above the slain Aigisthos, bides his blow
Dreadful Orestes!

Klutaimnestra, wise
This time, forbore; Elektra held her own;
Saved was Athenai through Euripides,

Through Euthukles, through—more than ever—
me,
Balaustion, me, who, Wild-pomegranate-flower,
Felt my fruit triumph, and fade proudly so!

But next day, as ungracious minds are wont,
The Spartan, late surprised into a grace,
Grew sudden sober at the enormity,
And grudged, by daybreak, midnight's easy gift;
Splenetically must repay its cost
By due increase of rigour, doglike snatch
At aught still left dog to concede like man.
Rough sea, at flow of tide, may lip, perchance,
Smoothly the land-line reached as for repose—
Lie indolent in all unquestioned sway;
But ebbing, when needs must, all thwart and loth,
Sea claws at sand relinquished strugglingly.
So, harsh Lusandros—pinioned to inflict
The lesser penalty alone—spoke harsh,
As minded to embitter scathe by scorn.

"Athenai's self be saved then, thank the Lyre!
If Tragedy withdraws her presence—quick,
If Comedy replace her,—what more just?
Let Comedy do service, frisk away,
Dance off stage these indomitable stones,
Long Walls, Peiraian bulwarks! Hew and heave,
Pick at, pound into dust each dear defence!
Not to the Kommos—*elelelelеu*
With breast bethumped, as Tragic lyre prefers,
But Comedy shall sound the flute, and crow
At kordax-end—the hearty slapping-dance!
Collect those flute-girls—trash who flattered ear
With whistlings and fed eye with caper-cuts
While we Lakonians supped black broth or
crunched

Sea-urchin, conchs and all, unpricked—coarse brutes!
Command they lead off step, time steady stroke
To spade and pickaxe, till demolished lie
Athenai's pride in powder!"

Done that day—
That sixteenth famed day of Munuchion-month!
The day when Hellas fought at Salamis,
The very day Euripides was born,
Those flute-girls—Phaps-Elaphion at their head—
Did blow their best, did dance their worst, the while
Sparté pulled down the walls, wrecked wide the works,
Laid low each merest molehill of defence,
And so the Power, Athenai, passed away!

We would not see its passing. Ere I knew
The issue of their counsels,—crouching low
And shrouded by my peplos,—I conceived,
Despite the shut eyes, the stopped ears,—by count
Only of heart-beats, telling the slow time,—
Athenai's doom was signed and signified
In that assembly,—ay, but knew there watched
One who would dare and do, nor bate at all
The stranger's licensed duty,—speak the word
Allowed the Man from Phokis! Nought remained
But urge departure, flee the sights and sounds,
Hideous exultings, wailings worth contempt,
And press to other earth, new heaven, by sea
That somehow ever prompts to 'scape despair.
Help rose to heart's wish; at the harbour-side,
The old grey mariner did reverence
To who had saved his ship, still weather-tight
As when with prow gay-garlanded she praised

The hospitable port and pushed to sea.
"Convoy Balaustion back to Rhodes, for sake
Of her and her Euripides!" laughed he.

Rhodes,—shall it not be there, my Euthukles,
Till this brief trouble of a life-time end,
That solitude—two make so populous!—
For food finds memories of the past suffice,
May be, anticipations,—hope so swells,—
Of some great future we, familiar once
With who so taught, should hail and entertain?
He lies now in the little valley, laughed
And moaned about by those mysterious streams,
Boiling and freezing, like the love and hate
Which helped or harmed him through his earthly course.
They mix in Arethousa by his grave.
The warm spring, traveller, dip thine arms into,
Brighten thy brow with! Life detests black cold.

I sent the tablets, the psalterion, so
Rewarded Sicily; the tyrant there
Bestowed them worthily in Phoibos' shrine.
A gold-graved writing tells—"I also loved
The poet, Free Athenai cheaply prized—
King Dionusios,—Archelaos-like!"

And see if young Philemon,—sure one day
To do good service and be loved himself,—
If he too have not made a votive verse!
"Grant, in good sooth, our great dead, all the same,
Retain their sense, as certain wise men say,
I 'd hang myself—to see Euripides!"
Hands off, Philemon! nowise hang thyself,
But pen the prime plays, labour the right life,
And die at good old age as grand men use,—

Keeping thee, with that great thought, warm the while,—
That he does live, Philemon! Ay, most sure!
"He lives!" hark,—waves say, winds sing out the same,
And yonder dares the citied ridge of Rhodes
Its headlong plunge from sky to sea, disparts
North bay from south,—each guarded calm, that guest
May enter gladly, blow what wind there will,—
Boiled round with breakers, to no other cry!
All in one choros,—what the master-word
They take up?—hark! "There are no gods, no gods!
Glory to God—who saves Euripides!"

THE INN ALBUM

THE INN ALBUM

1875

I

"That oblong book 's the Album; hand it here!
Exactly! page on page of gratitude
For breakfast, dinner, supper, and the view!
I praise these poets: they leave margin-space;
Each stanza seems to gather skirts around,
And primly, trimly, keep the foot's confine,
Modest and maidlike; lubber prose o'ersprawls
And straddling stops the path from left to right.
Since I want space to do my cipher-work,
Which poem spares a corner? What comes first?
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
(Open the window, we burn daylight, boy!)
Or see—succincter beauty, brief and bold—
'*If a fellow can dine On rumpsteaks and port wine,*
He needs not despair Of dining well here—'
'*Here!*' I myself could find a better rhyme!
That bard 's a Browning; he neglects the form:
But ah, the sense, ye gods, the weighty sense!
Still, I prefer this classic. Ay, throw wide!
I 'll quench the bits of candle yet unburnt.
A minute's fresh air, then to cipher-work!
Three little columns hold the whole account:
Ecarté, after which Blind Hookey, then
Cutting-the-Pack, five hundred pounds the cut.
'T is easy reckoning: I have lost, I think."

THE INN ALBUM

Two personages occupy this room
Shabby-genteel, that 's parlour to the inn
Perched on a view-commanding eminence ;
—Inn which may be a veritable house
Where somebody once lived and pleased good taste
Till tourists found his coign of vantage out,
And fingered blunt the individual mark,
And vulgarized things comfortably smooth.
On a sprig-pattern-papered wall there brays
Complaint to sky Sir Edwin's dripping stag ;
His couchant coast-guard creature corresponds ;
They face the Huguenot and Light o' the World.
Grim o'er the mirror on the mantelpiece,
Varnished and coffined, *Salmo ferox* glares
—Possibly at the List of Wines which, framed
And glazed, hangs somewhat prominent on peg.

So much describes the stuffy little room—
Vulgar flat smooth respectability :
Not so the burst of landscape surging in,
Sunrise and all, as he who of the pair
Is, plain enough, the younger personage
Draws sharp the shrieking curtain, sends aloft
The sash, spreads wide and fastens back to wall
Shutter and shutter, shows you England's best.
He leans into a living glory-bath
Of air and light where seems to float and move
The wooded watered country, hill and dale
And steel-bright thread of stream, a-smoke with mist,
A-sparkle with May morning, diamond drift
O' the sun-touched dew. Except the red-roofed patch
Of half a dozen dwellings that, crept close
For hill-side shelter, make the village-clump,
This inn is perched above to dominate—

Except such sign of human neighbourhood,
(And this surmised rather than sensible)
There 's nothing to disturb absolute peace,
The reign of English nature—which means art
And civilized existence. Wildness' self
Is just the cultured triumph. Presently
Deep solitude, be sure, reveals a Place
That knows the right way to defend itself:
Silence hems round a burning spot of life.
Now, where a Place burns, must a village brood,
And where a village broods, an inn should boast—
Close and convenient: here you have them both.
This inn, the Something-arms—the family's—
(Don't trouble Guillim: heralds leave out half!)
Is dear to lovers of the picturesque,
And epics have been planned here; but who plan
Take holy orders and find work to do.
Painters are more productive, stop a week,
Declare the prospect quite a Corot,—ay,
For tender sentiment,—themselves incline
Rather to handsweep large and liberal;
Then go, but not without success achieved
—Haply some pencil-drawing, oak or beech,
Ferns at the base and ivies up the bole,
On this a slug, on that a butterfly.
Nay, he who hooked the *salmo* pendent here,
Also exhibited, this same May-month,
'*Foxgloves: a study*'—so inspires the scene,
The air, which now the younger personage
Inflates him with till lungs o'erfraught are fain
Sigh forth a satisfaction might bestir
Even those tufts of tree-tops to the South
I' the distance where the green dies off to grey,
Which, easy of conjecture, front the Place;
He eyes them, elbows wide, each hand to cheek.

His fellow, the much older—either say
A youngish-old man or man oldish-young—
Sits at the table : wicks are noisome-deep
In wax, to detriment of plated ware ;
Above—piled, strewn—is store of playing-cards,
Counters and all that 's proper for a game.
He sets down, rubs out figures in the book,
Adds and subtracts, puts back here, carries there,
Until the summed-up satisfaction stands
Apparent, and he pauses o'er the work :
Soothes what of brain was busy under brow,
By passage of the hard palm, curing so
Wrinkle and crowfoot for a second's space ;
Then lays down book and laughs out. No mistake,
Such the sum-total—ask Colenso else !

Roused by which laugh, the other turns, laughs too—
The youth, the good strong fellow, rough perhaps.

"Well, what 's the damage—three, or four, or five?
How many figures in a row ? Hand here !
Come now, there 's one expense all yours not mine—
Scribbling the people's Album over, leaf
The first and foremost too ! You think, perhaps,
They 'll only charge you for a brand-new book
Nor estimate the literary loss ?
Wait till the small account comes ! '*To one night's Lodging*,'—for 'beds,' they can't say,—'*pound or so; Dinner, Apollinaris,—what they please, Attendance not included ;*' last looms large
'*Defacement of our Album, late enriched With*'—let 's see what ! Here, at the window, though !
Ay, breathe the morning and forgive your luck !

Fine enough country for a fool like me
To own, as next month I suppose I shall!
Eh? True fool's-fortune! so console yourself.
Let 's see, however—hand the book, I say!
Well, you 've improved the classic by romance.
Queer reading! Verse with parenthetic prose—
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
(Three-two fives) '*life how profitably spent*'
(Five-nought, five-nine fives) '*yonder humble cot,*'
(More and more noughts and fives) '*in mild content;*
And did my feelings find the natural vent
In friendship and in love, how blest my lot!'
Then follow the dread figures—five! '*Content!*'
That 's apposite! Are you content as he—
Simpkin the sonneteer? *Ten thousand pounds*
Give point to his effusion—by so much
Leave me the richer and the poorer you
After our night's play; who 's content the most,
I, you, or Simpkin?"

So the polished snob.
The elder man, refinement every inch
From brow to boot-end, quietly replies:

"Simpkin 's no name I know. I had my whim."

"Ay, had you! And such things make friendship thick.
Intimates I may boast we were; henceforth,
Friends—shall it not be?—who discard reserve,
Use plain words, put each dot upon each i,
Till death us twain do part? The bargain 's struck!
Old fellow, if you fancy—(to begin—)
I failed to penetrate your scheme last week,
You wrong your poor disciple. Oh, no airs!
Because you happen to be twice my age
And twenty times my master, must perforce

No blink of daylight struggle through the web
There 's no unwinding? You entoil my legs,
And welcome, for I like it: blind me,—no!
A very pretty piece of shuttle-work
Was that—your mere chance question at the club—
'*Do you go anywhere this Whitsuntide?*
I 'm off for Paris, there 's the Opera—there 's
The Salon, there 's a china-sale,—beside
Chantilly; and, for good companionship,
There 's Such-and-such and So-and-so. Suppose
We start together?' '*No such holiday!*'
I told you: '*Paris and the rest be hanged!*
Why plague me who am pledged to home-delights?
I 'm the engaged now; through whose fault but yours?
On duty. As you well know. Don't I drowse
The week away down with the Aunt and Niece?
No help: it 's leisure, loneliness and love.
Wish I could take you; but fame travels fast,—
A man of much newspaper-paragraph
You scare domestic circles; and beside
Would not you like your lot, that second taste
Of nature and approval of the grounds!
You might walk early or lie late, so shirk
Week-day devotions: but stay Sunday o'er,
And morning church is obligatory:
No mundane garb permissible, or dread
The butler's privileged monition! No!
Pack off to Paris, nor wipe tear away!'
Whereon how artlessly the happy flash
Followed, by inspiration! ''*Tell you what—*
Let 's turn their flank, try things on t' other side!
Inns for my money! Liberty 's the life!
We 'll lie in hiding: there 's the crow-nest nook,
The tourist's joy, the Inn they rave about,
Inn that 's out—out of sight and out of mind
And out of mischief to all four of us—

Aunt and niece, you and me. At night arrive;
At morn, find time for just a Pisgah-view
Of my friend's Land of Promise; then depart.
And while I 'm whizzing onward by first train,
Bound for our own place (since my Brother sulks
And says I shun him like the plague) yourself—
Why, you have stepped thence, start from platform, gay
Despite the sleepless journey,—love lends wings,—
Hug aunt and niece who, none the wiser, wait
The faithful advent! Eh?' 'With all my heart,'
Said I to you; said I to mine own self:
'Does he believe I fail to comprehend
He wants just one more final friendly snack
At friend's exchequer ere friend runs to earth,
Marries, renounces yielding friends such sport?'
And did I spoil sport, pull face grim,—nay, grave?
Your pupil does you better credit! No!
I parleyed with my pass-book,—rubbed my pair
At the big balance in my banker's hands,—
Folded a cheque cigar-case-shape,—just wants
Filling and signing,—and took train, resolved
To execute myself with decency
And let you win—if not Ten thousand quite,
Something by way of wind-up-farewell burst
Of firework-nosegay! Where 's your fortune fled?
Or is not fortune constant after all?
You lose ten thousand pounds: had I lost half
Or half that, I should bite my lips, I think.
You man of marble! Strut and stretch my best
On tiptoe, I shall never reach your height.
How does the loss feel! Just one lesson more!"
The more refined man smiles a frown away.

"The lesson shall be—only boys like you
Put such a question at the present stage.

I had a ball lodge in my shoulder once,
And, full five minutes, never guessed the fact ;
Next day, I felt decidedly : and still,
At twelve years' distance, when I lift my arm
A twinge reminds me of the surgeon's probe.
Ask me, this day month, how I feel my luck !
And meantime please to stop impertinence,
For—don't I know its object ? All this chaff
Covers the corn, this preface leads to speech,
This boy stands forth a hero. '*There, my lord !*
Our play was true play, fun not earnest ! I
Empty your purse, inside out, while my poke
Bulges to bursting ? You can badly spare
A doit, confess now, Duke though brother be !
While I 'm gold-daubed so thickly, spangles drop
And show my father's warehouse-apron : pshaw !
Enough ! We 've had a palpitating night !
Good morning ! Breakfast and forget our dreams !
My mouth 's shut, mind ! I tell nor man nor mouse.'
There, see ! He don't deny it ! Thanks, my boy !
Hero and welcome—only, not on me
Make trial of your 'prentice-hand ! Enough !
We 've played, I 've lost and owe ten thousand pounds,
Whereof I muster, at the moment,—well,
What 's for the bill here and the back to town.
Still, I 've my little character to keep :
You may expect your money at month's end."

The young man at the window turns round quick—
A clumsy giant handsome creature ; grasps
In his large red the little lean white hand
Of the other, looks him in the sallow face.

"I say now—is it right to so mistake
A fellow, force him in mere self-defence

To spout like Mister *Mild Acclivity*
In album-language? You know well enough
Whether I like you—*like* 's no album-word
Anyhow: point me to one soul beside
In the wide world I care one straw about!
I first set eyes on you a year ago;
Since when you 've done me good—I 'll stick to it—
More than I got in the whole twenty-five
That make my life up, Oxford years and all—
Throw in the three I fooled away abroad,
Seeing myself and nobody more sage
Until I met you, and you made me man
Such as the sort is and the fates allow.
I do think, since we two kept company,
I 've learnt to know a little—all through you!
It 's nature if I like you. Taunt away!
As if I need you teaching me my place—
The snob I am, the Duke your brother is,
When just the good you did was—teaching me
My own trade, how a snob and millionaire
May lead his life and let the Duke's alone,
Clap wings, free jackdaw, on his steeple-perch,
Burnish his black to gold in sun and air,
Nor pick up stray plumes, strive to match in strut
Regular peacocks who can't fly an inch
Over the courtyard-paling. Head and heart
(That 's album-style) are older than you know,
For all your knowledge: boy, perhaps—ay, boy
Had his adventure, just as he were man—
His ball-experience in the shoulder-blade,
His bit of life-long ache to recognize,
Although he bears it cheerily about,
Because you came and clapped him on the back,
Advised him '*Walk and wear the aching off!*'
Why, I was minded to sit down for life
Just in Dalmatia, build a sea-side tower

High on a rock, and so expend my days
Pursuing chemistry or botany
Or, very like, astronomy because
I noticed stars shone when I passed the place :
Letting my cash accumulate the while
In England—to lay out in lump at last
As Ruskin should direct me ! All or some
Of which should I have done or tried to do,
And preciously repented, one fine day,
Had you discovered Timon, climbed his rock
And scaled his tower, some ten years thence, suppose,
And coaxed his story from him ! Don't I see
The pair conversing ! It 's a novel writ
Already, I 'll be bound,—our dialogue !
' What ?' cried the elder and yet youthful man—
So did the eye flash 'neath the lordly front,
And the imposing presence swell with scorn,
As the haught high-bred bearing and dispose
Contrasted with his interlocutor
The flabby low-born who, of bulk before,
Had steadily increased, one stone per week,
Since his abstention from horse-exercise :—
' What ? you, as rich as Rothschild, left, you say,
London the very year you came of age,
Because your father manufactured goods—
Commission-agent hight of Manchester—
Partly, and partly through a baby case
Of disappointment I 've pumped out at last—
And here you spend life's prime in gaining flesh
And giving science one more asteroid ?'
Brief, my dear fellow, you instructed me,
At Alfred's and not Istria ! proved a snob
May turn a million to account although
His brother be no Duke, and see good days
Without the girl he lost and someone gained.

The end is, after one year's tutelage,
Having, by your help, touched society,
Polo, Tent-Pegging, Hurlingham, the Rink—
I leave all these delights, by your advice,
And marry my young pretty cousin here
Whose place, whose oaks ancestral you behold.
(Her father was in partnership with mine—
Does not his purchase look a pedigree?)
My million will be tails and tassels smart
To this plump-bodied kite, this house and land
Which, set a-soaring, pulls me, soft as sleep,
Along life's pleasant meadow,—arm left free
To lock a friend's in,—whose but yours, old boy?
Arm in arm glide we over rough and smooth,
While hand, to pocket held, saves cash from cards.
Now, if you don't esteem ten thousand pounds
(—Which I shall probably discover snug
Hid somewhere in the column-corner capped
With '*Credit*,' based on '*Balance*,'—which, I swear,
By this time next month I shall quite forget
Whether I lost or won—ten thousand pounds,
Which at this instant I would give . . . let 's see,
For Galopin—nay, for that Gainsborough
Sir Richard won't sell, and, if bought by me,
Would get my glance and praise some twice a year,—)
Well, if you don't esteem that price dirt-cheap
For teaching me Dalmatia was mistake—
Why then, my last illusion-bubble breaks,
My one discovered phœnix proves a goose,
My cleverest of all companions—oh,
Was worth nor ten pence nor ten thousand pounds!
Come! Be yourself again! So endeth here
The morning's lesson! Never while life lasts
Do I touch card again. To breakfast now!
To bed—I can't say, since you needs must start

For station early—oh, the down-train still,
First plan and best plan—townward trip be hanged!
You 're due at your big brother's—pay that debt,
Then owe me not a farthing! Order eggs—
And who knows but there 's trout obtainable?"

The fine man looks well-nigh malignant: then—

"Sir, please subdue your manner! Debts are debts:
I pay mine—debts of this sort—certainly.
What do I care how you regard your gains,
Want them or want them not? The thing *I* want
Is—not to have a story circulate
From club to club—how, bent on clearing out
Young So-and-so, young So-and-so cleaned me,
Then set the empty kennel flush again,
Ignored advantage and forgave his friend—
For why? There was no wringing blood from stone!
Oh, don't be savage! You would hold your tongue,
Bite it in two, as man may; but those small
Hours in the smoking-room, when instance apt
Rises to tongue's root, tingles on to tip,
And the thinned company consists of six
Capital well-known fellows one may trust!
Next week, it 's in the 'World.' No, thank you much.
I owe ten thousand pounds: I 'll pay them!"

"Now,—
This becomes funny. You 've made friends with me:
I can't help knowing of the ways and means!
Or stay! they say your brother closets up
Correggio's long-lost Leda: if he means
To give you that, and if you give it me . . ."

"*I* polished snob off to aristocrat?
You compliment me! father's apron still
Sticks out from son's court-vesture; still silk purse
Roughs finger with some bristle sow-ear-born!
Well, neither I nor you mean harm at heart!
I owe you and shall pay you: which premised,
Why should what follows sound like flattery?
The fact is—you do compliment too much
Your humble master, as I own I am;
You owe me no such thanks as you protest.
The polisher needs precious stone no less
Than precious stone needs polisher: believe
I struck no tint from out you but I found
Snug lying first 'neath surface hair-breadth-deep!
Beside, I liked the exercise: with skill
Goes love to show skill for skill's sake. You see,
I 'm old and understand things: too absurd
It were you pitched and tossed away your life,
As diamond were Scotch-pebble! all the more,
That I myself misused a stone of price.
Born and bred clever—people used to say
Clever as most men, if not something more—
Yet here I stand a failure, cut awry
Or left opaque,—no brilliant named and known.
Whate'er my inner stuff, my outside 's blank;
I 'm nobody—or rather, look that same—
I 'm—who I am—and know it; but I hold
What in my hand out for the world to see?
What ministry, what mission, or what book
—I 'll say, book even? Not a sign of these!
I began—laughing—'*All these when I like!*'
I end with—well, you 've hit it!—'*This boy's cheque*
For just as many thousands as he 'll spare!'
The first—I could, and would not; your spare cash
I would, and could not: have no scruple, pray,
But, as I hoped to pocket yours, pouch mine

—When you are able!"
"Which is—when to be?
I 've heard, great characters require a fall
Of fortune to show greatness by uprise:
They touch the ground to jollily rebound,
Add to the Album! Let a fellow share
Your secret of superiority!
I know, my banker makes the money breed
Money; I eat and sleep, he simply takes
The dividends and cuts the coupons off,
Sells out, buys in, keeps doubling, tripling cash,
While I do nothing but receive and spend.
But you, spontaneous generator, hatch
A wind-egg; cluck, and forth struts Capital
As Interest to me from egg of gold.
I am grown curious: pay me by all means!
How will you make the money?"
"Mind your own—
Not my affair. Enough: or money, or
Money's worth, as the case may be, expect
Ere month's end,—keep but patient for a month!
Who 's for a stroll to station? Ten 's the time;
Your man, with my things, follow in the trap;
At stoppage of the down-train, play the arrived
On platform, and you 'll show the due fatigue
Of the night-journey,—not much sleep,—perhaps,
Your thoughts were on before you—yes, indeed,
You join them, being happily awake
With thought's sole object as she smiling sits
At breakfast-table. I shall dodge meantime
In and out station-precinct, wile away
The hour till up my engine pants and smokes.
No doubt, she goes to fetch you. Never fear!
She gets no glance at me, who shame such
saints!"

II

So, they ring bell, give orders, pay, depart
Amid profuse acknowledgment from host
Who well knows what may bring the younger back.
They light cigar, descend in twenty steps
The "*calm acclivity*," inhale—beyond
Tobacco's balm—the better smoke of turf
And wood fire,—cottages at cookery
I' the morning,—reach the main road straitening on
'Twixt wood and wood, two black walls full of night
Slow to disperse, though mists thin fast before
The advancing foot, and leave the flint-dust fine
Each speck with its fire-sparkle. Presently
The road's end with the sky's beginning mix
In one magnificence of glare, due East,
So high the sun rides,—May 's the merry month.

They slacken pace: the younger stops abrupt,
Discards cigar, looks his friend full in face.

"All right; the station comes in view at end;
Five minutes from the beech-clump, there you are!
I say: let 's halt, let 's borrow yonder gate
Of its two magpies, sit and have a talk!
Do let a fellow speak a moment! More
I think about and less I like the thing—
No, you must let me! Now, be good for once!
Ten thousand pounds be done for, dead and damned!
We played for love, not hate: yes, hate! I hate
Thinking you beg or borrow or reduce
To strychnine some poor devil of a lord
Licked at Unlimited Loo. I had the cash
To lose—you knew that!—lose and none the less
Whistle to-morrow: it 's not every chap
Affords to take his punishment so well!

Now, don't be angry with a friend whose fault
Is that he thinks—upon my soul, I do—
Your head the best head going. Oh, one sees
Names in the newspaper—great this, great that,
Gladstone, Carlyle, the Laureate :—much I care!
Others have their opinion, I keep mine :
Which means—by right you ought to have the things
I want a head for. Here 's a pretty place,
My cousin's place, and presently my place,
Not yours! I 'll tell you how it strikes a man.
My cousin 's fond of music and of course
Plays the piano (it won't be for long!)
A brand-new bore she calls a '*semi-grand*,'
Rosewood and pearl, that blocks the drawing-room,
And cost no end of money. Twice a week
Down comes Herr Somebody and seats himself,
Sets to work teaching—with his teeth on edge—
I 've watched the rascal. '*Does he play first-rate?*'
I ask : '*I rather think so*,' answers she—
'*He 's What 's-his-Name!*'—'*Why give you lessons then?*'—
'*I pay three guineas and the train beside.*'—
'*This instrument, has he one such at home?*'—
'*He? Has to practise on a table-top,*
When he can't hire the proper thing.'—'*I see!*
You 've the piano, he the skill, and God
The distribution of such gifts.' So here :
After your teaching, I shall sit and strum
Polkas on this piano of a Place
You 'd make resound with *Rule Britannia!*"

"Thanks!
I don't say but this pretty cousin's place,
Appendaged with your million, tempts my hand
As key-board I might touch with some effect."

"Then, why not have obtained the like? House, land,
Money, are things obtainable, you see,
By clever head-work: ask my father else!
You, who teach me, why not have learned, yourself?
Played like Herr Somebody with power to thump
And flourish and the rest, not bend demure
Pointing out blunders—'*Sharp, not natural!*
Permit me—on the black key use the thumb!'
There 's some fatality, I 'm sure! You say
'*Marry the cousin, that 's your proper move!*'
And I do use the thumb and hit the sharp:
You should have listened to your own head's hint,
As I to you! The puzzle 's past my power,
How you have managed—with such stuff, such means—
Not to be rich nor great nor happy man:
Of which three good things where 's a sign at all?
Just look at Dizzy! Come,—what tripped your heels?
Instruct a goose that boasts wings and can't fly!
I wager I have guessed it!—never found
The old solution of the riddle fail!
'*Who was the woman?*' I don't ask, but—'*Where*
I' the path of life stood she who tripped you?'"

"Goose
You truly are! I own to fifty years.
Why don't I interpose and cut out—you?
Compete with five-and-twenty? Age, my boy!"

"Old man, no nonsense!—even to a boy
That 's ripe at least for rationality
Rapped into him, as may be mine was, once!
I 've had my small adventure lesson me
Over the knuckles!—likely, I forget

The sort of figure youth cuts now and then,
Competing with old shoulders but young head
Despite the fifty grizzling years!"

"Aha?
Then that means—just the bullet in the blade
Which brought Dalmatia on the brain,—that, too,
Came of a fatal creature? Can't pretend
Now for the first time to surmise as much!
Make a clean breast! Recount! a secret 's safe
'Twixt you, me and the gate-post!"

"—Can't pretend,
Neither, to never have surmised your wish!
It 's no use,—case of unextracted ball—
Winces at finger-touching. Let things be!"

"Ah, if you love your love still! I hate mine."

"I can't hate."

"I won't teach you; and won't tell
You, therefore, what you please to ask of me:
As if I, also, may not have my ache!"

"My sort of ache? No, no! and yet—perhaps!
All comes of thinking you superior still.
But live and learn! I say! Time 's up! Good jump!
You old, indeed! I fancy there 's a cut
Across the wood, a grass path: shall we try?
It 's venturesome, however!"

"Stop, my boy!
Don't think I 'm stingy of experience! Life
—It 's like this wood we leave. Should you and I

Go wandering about there, though the gaps
We went in and came out by were opposed
As the two poles, still, somehow, all the same,
By nightfall we should probably have chanced
On much the same main points of interest—
Both of us measured girth of mossy trunk,
Stript ivy from its strangled prey, clapped hands
At squirrel, sent a fir-cone after crow,
And so forth,—never mind what time betwixt.
So in our lives; allow I entered mine
Another way than you: 't is possible
I ended just by knocking head against
That plaguy low-hung branch yourself began
By getting bump from; as at last you too
May stumble o'er that stump which first of all
Bade me walk circumspectly. Head and feet
Are vulnerable both, and I, foot-sure,
Forgot that ducking down saves brow from bruise.
I, early old, played young man four years since
And failed confoundedly: so, hate alike
Failure and who caused failure,—curse her cant!"

"Oh, I see! You, though somewhat past the prime,
Were taken with a rosebud beauty! Ah—
But how should chits distinguish? She admired
Your marvel of a mind, I 'll undertake!
But as to body . . . nay, I mean . . . that is,
When years have told on face and figure . . ."

"Thanks,
Mister *Sufficiently-Instructed!* Such
No doubt was bound to be the consequence
To suit your self-complacency: she liked
My head enough, but loved some heart beneath
Some head with plenty of brown hair a-top

After my young friend's fashion ! What becomes
Of that fine speech you made a minute since
About the man of middle age you found
A formidable peer at twenty-one ?
So much for your mock-modesty ! and yet
I back your first against this second sprout
Of observation, insight, what you please.
My middle age, Sir, had too much success !
It 's odd : my case occurred four years ago—
I finished just while you commenced that turn
I' the wood of life that takes us to the wealth
Of honeysuckle, heaped for who can reach.
Now, I don't boast : it 's bad style, and beside,
The feat proves easier than it looks : I plucked
Full many a flower unnamed in that bouquet
(Mostly of peonies and poppies, though !)
Good nature sticks into my button-hole.
Therefore it was with nose in want of snuff
Rather than Ess or Psidium, that I chanced
On what—so far from '*rosebud beauty*' . . . Well—
She 's dead : at least you never heard her name ;
She was no courtly creature, had nor birth
Nor breeding—mere fine-lady-breeding ; but
Oh, such a wonder of a woman ! Grand
As a Greek statue ! Stick fine clothes on that,
Style that a Duchess or a Queen,—you know,
Artists would make an outcry : all the more,
That she had just a statue's sleepy grace
Which broods o'er its own beauty. Nay, her fault
(Don't laugh !) was just perfection : for suppose
Only the little flaw, and I had peeped
Inside it, learned what soul inside was like.
At Rome some tourist raised the grit beneath
A Venus' forehead with his whittling-knife—
I wish,—now,—I had played that brute, brought
blood

To surface from the depths I fancied chalk!
As it was, her mere face surprised so much
That I stopped short there, struck on heap, as stares
The cockney stranger at a certain bust
With drooped eyes,—she 's the thing I have in mind,—
Down at my Brother's. All sufficient prize—
Such outside! Now,—confound me for a prig!—
Who cares? I'll make a clean breast once for all!
Beside, you 've heard the gossip. My life long
I 've been a woman-liker,—liking means
Loving and so on. There 's a lengthy list
By this time I shall have to answer for—
So say the good folk: and they don't guess half—
For the worst is, let once collecting-itch
Possess you, and, with perspicacity,
Keeps growing such a greediness that theft
Follows at no long distance,—there 's the fact!
I knew that on my Leporello-list
Might figure this, that, and the other name
Of feminine desirability,
But if I happened to desire inscribe,
Along with these, the only Beautiful—
Here was the unique specimen to snatch
Or now or never. 'Beautiful' I said—
'Beautiful' say in cold blood,—boiling then
To tune of '*Haste, secure whate'er the cost*
This rarity, die in the act, be damned,
So you complete collection, crown your list!'
It seemed as though the whole world, once aroused
By the first notice of such wonder's birth,
Would break bounds to contest my prize with me
The first discoverer, should she but emerge
From that safe den of darkness where she dozed
Till I stole in, that country-parsonage

Where, country-parson's daughter, motherless,
Brotherless, sisterless, for eighteen years
She had been vegetating lily-like.
Her father was my brother's tutor, got
The living that way: him I chanced to see—
Her I saw—her the world would grow one eye
To see, I felt no sort of doubt at all!
'*Secure her!*' cried the devil: '*afterward*
Arrange for the disposal of the prize!'
The devil's doing! yet I seem to think—
Now, when all 's done,—think with '*a head reposed*'
In French phrase—hope I think I meant to do
All requisite for such a rarity
When I should be at leisure, have due time
To learn requirement. But in evil day—
Bless me, at week's end, long as any year,
The father must begin '*Young Somebody*,
Much recommended—for I break a rule—
Comes here to read, next Long Vacation.' '*Young!*'
That did it. Had the epithet been '*rich*,'
'*Noble*,' '*a genius*,' even '*handsome*,'—but
—'*Young*'!"

"I say—just a word! I want to know—
You are not married?"

"I?"

"Nor ever were?"

"Never! Why?"

"Oh, then—never mind! Go on!
I had a reason for the question."

"Come,—
You could not be the young man?"

"No, indeed!
Certainly—if you never married her!"
"That I did not: and there 's the curse, you 'll see!
Nay, all of it 's one curse, my life's mistake
Which, nourished with manure that 's warranted
To make the plant bear wisdom, blew out full
In folly beyond field-flower-foolishness!
The lies I used to tell my womankind,
Knowing they disbelieved me all the time
Though they required my lies, their decent due,
This woman—not so much believed, I 'll say,
As just anticipated from my mouth:
Since being true, devoted, constant—she
Found constancy, devotion, truth, the plain
And easy commonplace of character.
No mock-heroics but seemed natural
To her who underneath the face, I knew
Was fairness' self, possessed a heart, I judged
Must correspond in folly just as far
Beyond the common,—and a mind to match,—
Not made to puzzle conjurers like me
Who, therein, proved the fool who fronts you, Sir,
And begs leave to cut short the ugly rest!
'*Trust me!*' I said: she trusted. '*Marry me!*'
Or rather, '*We are married: when, the rite?*'
That brought on the collector's next-day qualm
At counting acquisition's cost. There lay
My marvel, there my purse more light by much
Because of its late lie-expenditure:
Ill-judged such moment to make fresh demand—
To cage as well as catch my rarity!
So, I began explaining. At first word
Outbroke the horror. '*Then, my truths were lies!*'
I tell you, such an outbreak, such new strange

All-unsuspected revelation—soul
As supernaturally grand as face
Was fair beyond example—that at once
Either I lost—or, if it please you, found
My senses,—stammered somehow—'*Jest! and now*',
Earnest! Forget all else but—heart has loved,
Does love, shall love you ever! take the hand!'
Not she! no marriage for superb disdain,
Contempt incarnate!"

"Yes, it 's different,—
It 's only like in being four years since.
I see now!"

"Well, what did disdain do next,
Think you?"

"That 's past me: did not marry you!—
That 's the main thing I care for, I suppose.
Turned nun, or what?"

"Why, married in a month
Some parson, some smug crop-haired smooth-chinned sort
Of curate-creature, I suspect,—dived down,
Down, deeper still, and came up somewhere else—
I don't know where—I 've not tried much to know,—
In short, she 's happy: what the clodpoles call
'Countrified' with a vengeance! leads the life
Respectable and all that drives you mad:
Still—where, I don't know, and that 's best for both."

"Well, that she did not like you, I conceive.
But why should you hate her, I want to know?"

"My good young friend,—because or her or else
Malicious Providence I have to hate.

For, what I tell you proved the turning-point
Of my whole life and fortune toward success
Or failure. If I drown, I lay the fault
Much on myself who caught at reed not rope,
But more on reed which, with a packthread's pith,
Had buoyed me till the minute's cramp could thaw
And I strike out afresh and so be saved.
It 's easy saying—I had sunk before,
Disqualified myself by idle days
And busy nights, long since, from holding hard
On cable, even, had fate cast me such !
You boys don't know how many times men fail
Perforce o' the little to succeed i' the large,
Husband their strength, let slip the petty prey,
Collect the whole power for the final pounce.
My fault was the mistaking man's main prize
For intermediate boy's diversion ; clap
Of boyish hands here frightened game away
Which, once gone, goes for ever. Oh, at first
I took the anger easily, nor much
Minded the anguish—having learned that storms
Subside, and teapot-tempests are akin.
Time would arrange things, mend whate'er might be
Somewhat amiss ; precipitation, eh ?
Reason and rhyme prompt—reparation ! Tiffs
End properly in marriage and a dance !
I said ' We 'll marry, make the past a blank '—
And never was such damnable mistake !
That interview, that laying bare my soul,
As it was first, so was it last chance—one
And only. Did I write ? Back letter came
Unopened as it went. Inexorable
She fled, I don't know where, consoled herself
With the smug curate-creature : chop and change!
Sure am I, when she told her shaveling all
His Magdalen's adventure, tears were shed,

Forgiveness evangelically shown,
'Loose hair and lifted eye,'—as someone says.
And now, he's worshipped for his pains, the sneak!"

'Well, but your turning-point of life,—what's here
To hinder you contesting Finsbury
With Orton, next election? I don't see . . ."

"Not you! But *I* see. Slowly, surely, creeps
Day by day o'er me the conviction—here
Was life's prize grasped at, gained, and then let go!
—That with her—may be, for her—I had felt
Ice in me melt, grow steam, drive to effect
Any or all the fancies sluggish here
I' the head that needs the hand she would not take
And I shall never lift now. Lo, your wood—
Its turnings which I likened life to! Well,—
There she stands, ending every avenue,
Her visionary presence on each goal
I might have gained had we kept side by side!
Still string nerve and strike foot? Her frown forbids:
The steam congeals once more: I 'm old again!
Therefore I hate myself—but how much worse
Do not I hate who would not understand,
Let me repair things—no, but sent a-slide
My folly falteringly, stumblingly
Down, down and deeper down until I drop
Upon—the need of your ten thousand pounds
And consequently loss of mine! I lose
Character, cash, nay, common-sense itself
Recounting such a lengthy cock-and-bull
Adventure—lose my temper in the act . . ."

"And lose beside,—if I may supplement
The list of losses,—train and ten-o'clock!

Hark, pant and puff, there travels the swart sign !
So much the better ! You 're my captive now !
I 'm glad you trust a fellow : friends grow thick
This way—that 's twice said ; we were thickish, though,
Even last night, and, ere night comes again,
I prophesy good luck to both of us !
For see now !—back to '*balmy eminence*'
Or '*calm acclivity*,' or what 's the word !
Bestow you there an hour, concoct at ease
A sonnet for the Album, while I put
Bold face on, best foot forward, make for house,
March in to aunt and niece, and tell the truth—
(Even white-lying goes against my taste
After your little story). Oh, the niece
Is rationality itself ! The aunt—
If she 's amenable to reason too—
Why, you stopped short to pay her due respect,
And let the Duke wait (I 'll work well the Duke).
If she grows gracious, I return for you ;
If thunder 's in the air, why—bear your doom,
Dine on rump-steaks and port, and shake the dust
Of aunty from your shoes as off you go
By evening-train, nor give the thing a thought
How you shall pay me—that 's as sure as fate,
Old fellow ! Off with you, face left about !
Yonder 's the path I have to pad. You see,
I 'm in good spirits, God knows why ! Perhaps
Because the woman did not marry you
—Who look so hard at me,—and have the right,
One must be fair and own."

The two stand still
Under an oak.

"Look here !" resumes the youth.
"I never quite knew how I came to like

You—so much—whom I ought not court at all :
Nor how you had a leaning just to me
Who am assuredly not worth your pains.
For there must needs be plenty such as you
Somewhere about,—although I can't say where,—
Able and willing to teach all you know ;
While—how can you have missed a score like me
With money and no wit, precisely each
A pupil for your purpose, were it—ease
Fool's poke of tutor's *honorarium*-fee ?
And yet, howe'er it came about, I felt
At once my master : you as prompt descried
Your man, I warrant, so was bargain struck.
Now, these same lines of liking, loving, run
Sometimes so close together they converge—
Life's great adventures—you know what I mean—
In people. Do you know, as you advanced,
It got to be uncommonly like fact
We two had fallen in with—liked and loved
Just the same woman in our different ways ?
I began life—poor groundling as I prove—
Winged and ambitious to fly high : why not ?
There 's something in ' Don Quixote ' to the point,
My shrewd old father used to quote and praise—
'*Am I born man?*' asks Sancho : '*being man,*
By possibility I may be Pope !'
So, Pope I meant to make myself, by step
And step, whereof the first should be to find
A perfect woman ; and I tell you this—
If what I fixed on, in the order due
Of undertakings, as next step, had first
Of all disposed itself to suit my tread,
And I had been, the day I came of age,
Returned at head of poll for Westminster
—Nay, and moreover summoned by the Queen
At week's end, when my maiden-speech bore fruit

To form and head a Tory ministry—
It would not have seemed stranger, no, nor been
More strange to me, as now I estimate,
Than what did happen—sober truth, no dream.
I saw my wonder of a woman,—laugh,
I 'm past that !—in Commemoration-week.
A plenty have I seen since, fair and foul,—
With eyes, too, helped by your sagacious wink ;
But one to match that marvel—no least trace,
Least touch of kinship and community !
The end was—I did somehow state the fact,
Did, with no matter what imperfect words,
One way or other give to understand
That woman, soul and body were her slave
Would she but take, but try them—any test
Of will, and some poor test of power beside :
So did the strings within my brain grow tense
And capable of . . . hang similitudes !
She answered kindly but beyond appeal.
'*No sort of hope for me, who came too late.*
She was another's. Love went—mine to her,
Hers just as loyally to someone else.'
Of course ! I might expect it ! Nature's law—
Given the peerless woman, certainly
Somewhere shall be the peerless man to match !
I acquiesced at once, submitted me
In something of a stupor, went my way.
I fancy there had been some talk before
Of somebody—her father or the like—
To coach me in the holidays,—that 's how
I came to get the sight and speech of her,—
But I had sense enough to break off sharp,
Save both of us the pain."

"Quite right there !"

"Eh ?

Quite wrong, it happens! Now comes worst of all!
Yes, I did sulk aloof and let alone
The lovers—*I* disturb the angel-mates?"

"Seraph paired off with cherub!"

"Thank you! While
I never plucked up courage to inquire
Who he was, even,—certain-sure of this,
That nobody I knew of had blue wings
And wore a star-crown as he needs must do,—
Some little lady,—plainish, pock-marked girl,—
Finds out my secret in my woeful face,
Comes up to me at the Apollo Ball,
And pityingly pours her wine and oil
This way into the wound: '*Dear f-f-friend*,
Why waste affection thus on—must I say,
A somewhat worthless object? Who 's her choice—
Irrevocable as deliberate—
Out of the wide world? I shall name no names—
But there 's a person in society,
Who, blessed with rank and talent, has grown grey
In idleness and sin of every sort
Except hypocrisy: he 's thrice her age,
A by-word for "successes with the sex"
As the French say—and, as we ought to say,
Consummately a liar and a rogue,
Since—show me where 's the woman won without
The help of this one lie which she believes—
That—never mind how things have come to pass,
And let who loves have loved a thousand times—
All the same he now loves her only, loves
Her ever! if by "won" you just mean "sold,"
That 's quite another compact. Well, this scamp,
Continuing descent from bad to worse,
Must leave his fine and fashionable prey

(Who—fathered, brothered, husbanded,—are hedged
About with thorny danger) and apply
His arts to this poor country ignorance
Who sees forthwith in the first rag of man
Her model hero! Why continue waste
On such a woman treasures of a heart
Would yet find solace,—yes, my f-f-friend—
In some congenial—fiddle-diddle-dee?'"

"Pray, is the pleasant gentleman described
Exact the portrait which my '*f-f-friends*'
Recognize as so like? 'T is evident
You half surmised the sweet original
Could be no other than myself, just now!
Your stop and start were flattering!"

"Of course
Caricature 's allowed for in a sketch!
The longish nose becomes a foot in length,
The swarthy cheek gets copper-coloured,—still,
Prominent beak and dark-hued skin are facts:
And '*parson's daughter*'—'*young man coachable*'—
'*Elderly party*'—'*four years since*'—were facts
To fasten on, a moment! Marriage, though—
That made the difference, I hope."

"All right!
I never married; wish I had—and then
Unwish it: people kill their wives, sometimes!
I hate my mistress, but I 'm murder-free.
In your case, where 's the grievance? You came last,
The earlier bird picked up the worm. Suppose
You, in the glory of your twenty-one,
Had happened to precede myself! 't is odds
But this gigantic juvenility,
This offering of a big arm's bony hand—

I 'd rather shake than feel shake me, I know—
Had moved *my* dainty mistress to admire
An altogether new Ideal—deem
Idolatry less due to life's decline
Productive of experience, powers mature
By dint of usage, the made man—no boy
That 's all to make! I was the earlier bird—
And what I found, I let fall; what you missed
Who is the fool that blames you for?"

"Myself—
For nothing, everything! For finding out
She, whom I worshipped, was a worshipper
In turn of . . . but why stir up settled mud?
She married him—the fifty-years-old rake—
How you have teased the talk from me! At last
My secret 's told you. I inquired no more,
Nay, stopped ears when informants unshut mouth;
Enough that she and he live, deuce take where,
Married and happy, or else miserable—
It 's 'Cut-the-pack;' she turned up ace or knave,
And I left Oxford, England, dug my hole
Out in Dalmatia, till you drew me thence
Badger-like,—'*Back to London*' was the word—
'*Do things, a many, there, you fancy hard,*
I 'll undertake are easy!'—the advice.
I took it, had my twelvemonth's fling with you—
(Little hand holding large hand pretty tight
For all its delicacy—eh, my lord?),
Until when, t' other day, I got a turn
Somehow and gave up tired: and '*Rest!*' bade you,
'*Marry your cousin, double your estate,*
And take your ease by all means!' So, I loll
On this the springy sofa, mine next month—
Or should loll, but that you must needs beat rough
The very down you spread me out so smooth.

I wish this confidence were still to make!
Ten thousand pounds? You owe me twice the sum
For stirring up the black depths! There 's repose
Or, at least, silence when misfortune seems
All that one has to bear; but folly—yes,
Folly, it all was! Fool to be so meek,
So humble,—such a coward rather say!
Fool, to adore the adorer of a fool!
Not to have faced him, tried (a useful hint)
My big and bony, here, against the bunch
Of lily-coloured five with signet-ring,
Most like, for little-finger's sole defence—
Much as you flaunt the blazon there! I grind
My teeth, that bite my very heart, to think—
To know I might have made that woman mine
But for the folly of the coward—know—
Or what 's the good of my apprenticeship
This twelvemonth to a master in the art?
Mine—had she been mine—just one moment mine
For honour, for dishonour—anyhow,
So that my life, instead of stagnant . . . Well,
You 've poked and proved stagnation is not sleep—
Hang you!"

"Hang *you* for an ungrateful goose!
All this means—I who since I knew you first
Have helped you to conceit yourself this cock
O' the dunghill with all hens to pick and choose—
Ought to have helped you when shell first was chipped
By chick that wanted prompting '*Use the spur!*'
While I was elsewhere putting mine to use.
As well might I blame you who kept aloof,
Seeing you could not guess I was alive,
Never advised me '*Do as I have done—*
Reverence such a jewel as your luck

Has scratched up to enrich unworthiness!'
As your behaviour was should mine have been,
—Faults which we both, too late, are sorry for:
Opposite ages, each with its mistake!
'*If youth but would—if age but could*,' you know.
Don't let us quarrel. Come, we 're—young and old—
Neither so badly off. Go you your way,
Cut to the Cousin! I 'll to Inn, await
The issue of diplomacy with Aunt,
And wait my hour on '*calm acclivity*'
In rumination manifold—perhaps
About ten thousand pounds I have to pay!"

III

Now, as the elder lights the fresh cigar
Conducive to resource, and saunteringly
Betakes him to the left-hand backward path,—
While, much sedate, the younger strides away
To right and makes for—islanded in lawn
And edged with shrubbery—the brilliant bit
Of Barry's building that 's the Place,—a pair
Of women, at this nick of time, one young,
One very young, are ushered with due pomp
Into the same Inn-parlour—"*disengaged*
Entirely now!" the obsequious landlord smiles,
"*Since the late occupants—whereof but one*
Was quite a stranger"—(smile enforced by bow)
"*Left, a full two hours since, to catch the train,*
Probably for the stranger's sake!" (Bow, smile,
And backing out from door soft-closed behind.)

Woman and girl, the two, alone inside,
Begin their talk: the girl, with sparkling eyes—
"Oh, I forewent him purposely! but you,

Who joined at—journeyed from the Junction here—
I wonder how he failed your notice. Few
Stop at our station : fellow-passengers
Assuredly you were—I saw indeed
His servant, therefore he arrived all right.
I wanted, you know why, to have you safe
Inside here first of all, so dodged about
The dark end of the platform ; that 's his way—
To swing from station straight to avenue
And stride the half a mile for exercise.
I fancied you might notice the huge boy.
He soon gets o'er the distance ; at the house
He 'll hear I went to meet him and have missed ;
He 'll wait. No minute of the hour 's too much
Meantime for our preliminary talk :
First word of which must be—O good beyond
Expression of all goodness—you to come ! "

The elder, the superb one, answers slow.

"There was no helping that. You called for me,
Cried, rather : and my old heart answered you.
Still, thank me ! since the effort breaks a vow—
At least, a promise to myself."

"I know !
How selfish get you happy folk to be !
If I should love my husband, must I needs
Sacrifice straightway all the world to him,
As you do ? Must I never dare leave house
On this dread Arctic expedition, out
And in again, six mortal hours, though you,
You even, my own friend for evermore,
Adjure me—fast your friend till rude love pushed
Poor friendship from her vantage—just to grant

The quarter of a whole day's company
And counsel? This makes counsel so much more
Need and necessity. For here 's my block
Of stumbling: in the face of happiness
So absolute, fear chills me. If such change
In heart be but love's easy consequence,
Do I love? If to marry mean—let go
All I now live for, should my marriage be?"

The other never once has ceased to gaze
On the great elm-tree in the open, posed
Placidly full in front, smooth bole, broad branch,
And leafage, one green plenitude of May.
The gathered thought runs into speech at last.

"O you exceeding beauty, bosomful
Of lights and shades, murmurs and silences,
Sun-warmth, dew-coolness,—squirrel, bee and bird,
High, higher, highest, till the blue proclaims
'*Leave earth, there 's nothing better till next step Heavenward!*'—so, off flies what has wings to help!"

And henceforth they alternate. Says the girl—

"That 's saved then: marriage spares the early taste."

"Four years now, since my eye took note of tree!"

"If I had seen no other tree but this
My life long, while yourself came straight, you said,
From tree which overstretched you and was just
One fairy tent with pitcher-leaves that held

Wine, and a flowery wealth of suns and moons,
And magic fruits whereon the angels feed—
I looking out of window on a tree
Like yonder—otherwise well-known, much-liked,
Yet just an English ordinary elm—
What marvel if you cured me of conceit
My elm's bird-bee-and-squirrel tenantry
Was quite the proud possession I supposed?
And there is evidence you tell me true.
The fairy marriage-tree reports itself
Good guardian of the perfect face and form,
Fruits of four years' protection! Married friend,
You are more beautiful than ever!"

"Yes:
I think that likely. I could well dispense
With all thought fair in feature, mine or no,
Leave but enough of face to know me by—
With all found fresh in youth except such strength
As lets a life-long labour earn repose
Death sells at just that price, they say; and so,
Possibly, what I care not for, I keep."

"How you must know he loves you! Chill,
before,
Fear sinks to freezing. Could I sacrifice—
Assured my lover simply loves my soul—
One nose-breadth of fair feature? No, indeed!
Your own love . . ."

"The preliminary hour—
Don't waste it!"

"But I can't begin at once!
The angel's self that comes to hear me speak
Drives away all the care about the speech.

What an angelic mystery you are—
Now—that is certain! when I knew you first,
No break of halo and no bud of wing!
I thought I knew you, saw you, round and through,
Like a glass ball; suddenly, four years since,
You vanished, how and whither? Mystery!
Wherefore? No mystery at all: you loved,
Were loved again, and left the world of course:
Who would not? Lapped four years in fairyland,
Out comes, by no less wonderful a chance,
The changeling, touched athwart her trellised bliss
Of blush-rose bower by just the old friend's voice
That 's now struck dumb at her own potency.
I talk of my small fortunes? Tell me yours
Rather! The fool I ever was—I am,
You see that: the true friend you ever had,
You have, you also recognize. Perhaps,
Giving you all the love of all my heart,
Nature, that 's niggard in me, has denied
The after-birth of love there 's someone claims
—This huge boy, swinging up the avenue;
And I want counsel: is defect in me,
Or him who has no right to raise the love?
My cousin asks my hand: he 's young enough,
Handsome,—my maid thinks,—manly 's more the word:
He asked my leave to '*drop*' the elm-tree there,
Some morning before breakfast. Gentleness
Goes with the strength, of course. He 's honest too,
Limpidly truthful. For ability—
All 's in the rough yet. His first taste of life
Seems to have somehow gone against the tongue:
He travelled, tried things—came back, tried still more—
He says he 's sick of all. He 's fond of me
After a certain careless-earnest way

I like: the iron 's crude,—no polished steel
Somebody forged before me. I am rich—
That 's not the reason, he 's far richer: no,
Nor is it that he thinks me pretty,—frank
Undoubtedly on that point! He saw once
The pink of face-perfection—oh, not you—
Content yourself, my beauty!—for she proved
So thoroughly a cheat, his charmer . . . nay,
He runs into extremes, I 'll say at once,
Lest you say! Well, I understand he wants
Someone to serve, something to do: and both
Requisites so abound in me and mine
That here 's the obstacle which stops consent:
The smoothness is too smooth, and I mistrust
The unseen cat beneath the counterpane.
Therefore I thought '*Would she but judge for me,*
Who, judging for herself succeeded so!'
Do I love him, does he love me, do both
Mistake for knowledge—easy ignorance?
Appeal to its proficient in each art!
I got rough-smooth through a piano-piece,
Rattled away last week till tutor came,
Heard me to end, then grunted '*Ach, mein Gott!*
Sagen Sie "easy"? Every note is wrong.
All thumped mit wrist: we 'll trouble fingers now.
The Fräulein will please roll up Raff again
And exercise at Czerny for one month!'
Am I to roll up cousin, exercise
At Trollope's novels for one month? Pronounce!"

"Now, place each in the right position first,
Adviser and advised one! I perhaps
Am three—nay, four years older; am, beside,
A wife: advantages—to balance which,
You have a full fresh joyous sense of life
That finds you out life's fit food everywhere,

Detects enjoyment where I, slow and dull,
Fumble at fault. Already, these four years,
Your merest glimpses at the world without
Have shown you more than ever met my gaze ;
And now, by joyance you inspire joy,—learn
While you profess to teach, and teach, although
Avowedly a learner. I am dazed
Like any owl by sunshine which just sets
The sparrow preening plumage ! Here 's to spy
—Your cousin ! You have scanned him all your life,
Little or much ; I never saw his face.
You have determined on a marriage—used
Deliberation therefore—I 'll believe
No otherwise, with opportunity
For judgment so abounding ! Here stand I—
Summoned to give my sentence, for a whim,
(Well, at first cloud-fleck thrown athwart your blue)
Judge what is strangeness' self to me,—say '*Wed!*'
Or '*Wed not !*' whom you promise I shall judge
Presently, at propitious lunch-time, just
While he carves chicken ! Sends he leg for wing?
That revelation into character
And conduct must suffice me ! Quite as well
Consult with yonder solitary crow
That eyes us from your elm-top !"

"Still the same !
Do you remember, at the library
We saw together somewhere, those two books
Somebody said were noticeworthy ? One
Lay wide on table, sprawled its painted leaves
For all the world's inspection ; shut on shelf
Reclined the other volume, closed, clasped, locked—
Clear to be let alone. Which page had we
Preferred the turning over of ? You were,
Are, ever will be the locked lady, hold

Inside you secrets written,—soul-absorbed,
My ink upon your blotting-paper. *I*—
What trace of you have I to show in turn?
Delicate secrets! No one juvenile
Ever essayed at croquet and performed
Superiorly but I confided you
The sort of hat he wore and hair it held.
While you? One day a calm note comes by post:
'*I am just married, you may like to hear.*'
Most men would hate you, or they ought; we love
What we fear,—*I* do! '*Cold*' I shall expect
My cousin calls you. I—dislike not him,
But (if I comprehend what loving means)
Love you immeasurably more—more—more
Than even he who, loving you his wife,
Would turn up nose at who impertinent,
Frivolous, forward—*loves* that excellence
Of all the earth he bows in worship to!
And who 's this paragon of privilege?
Simply a country parson: his the charm
That worked the miracle! Oh, too absurd
But that you stand before me as you stand!
Such beauty does prove something, everything!
Beauty 's the prize-flower which dispenses eye
From peering into what has nourished root—
Dew or manure: the plant best knows its place.
Enough, from teaching youth and tending age
And hearing sermons,—haply writing tracts,—
From such strange love-besprinkled compost, lo,
Out blows this triumph! Therefore love 's the soil
Plants find or fail of. You, with wit to find,
Exercise wit on the old friend's behalf,
Keep me from failure! Scan and scrutinize
This cousin! Surely he 's as worth your pains
To study as my elm-tree, crow and all,
You still keep staring at. I read your thoughts."

"At last?"

"At first! '*Would, tree, a-top of thee*
I winged were, like crow perched moveless there,
And so could straightway soar, escape this bore,
Back to my nest where broods whom I love best—
The parson o'er his parish—garish—rarish—'
Oh I could bring the rhyme in if I tried:
The Album here inspires me! Quite apart
From lyrical expression, have I read
The stare aright, and sings not soul just so?"

"Or rather *so?* '*Cool comfortable elm*
That men make coffins out of,—none for me
At thy expense, so thou permit I glide
Under thy ferny feet, and there sleep, sleep,
Nor dread awaking though in heaven itself!'"

The younger looks with face struck sudden white.
The elder answers its inquiry.

"Dear,
You are a guesser, not a '*clairvoyante.*'
I 'll so far open you the locked and shelved
Volume, my soul, that you desire to see,
As let you profit by the title-page——"

"*Paradise Lost?*"

"*Inferno!*—All which comes
Of tempting me to break my vow. Stop here!
Friend, whom I love the best in the whole world,
Come at your call, be sure that I will do
All your requirement—see and say my mind.
It may be that by sad apprenticeship
I have a keener sense: I 'll task the same.
Only indulge me—here let sight and speech

Happen—this Inn is neutral ground, you know!
I cannot visit the old house and home,
Encounter the old sociality
Abjured for ever. Peril quite enough
In even this first—last, I pray it prove—
Renunciation of my solitude!
Back, you, to house and cousin! Leave me here,
Who want no entertainment, carry still
My occupation with me. While I watch
The shadow inching round those ferny feet,
Tell him '*A school-friend wants a word with me*
Up at the inn: time, tide and train won't wait:
I must go see her—on and off again—
You 'll keep me company?' Ten minutes' talk,
With you in presence, ten more afterward
With who, alone, convoys me station-bound,
And I see clearly—and say honestly
To-morrow: pen shall play tongue's part, you know.
Go—quick! for I have made our hand-in-hand
Return impossible. So scared you look,—
If cousin does not greet you with '*What ghost*
Has crossed your path?' I set him down obtuse."
And after one more look, with face still white,
The younger does go, while the elder stands
Occupied by the elm at window there.

IV

Occupied by the elm; and, as its shade
Has crept clock-hand-wise till it ticks at fern
Five inches further to the South, the door
Opens abruptly, someone enters sharp,
The elder man returned to wait the youth:
Never observes the room's new occupant,
Throws hat on table, stoops quick, elbow-propped

Over the Album wide there, bends down brow
A cogitative minute, whistles shrill,
Then,—with a cheery-hopeless laugh-and-lose
Air of defiance to fate visibly
Casting the toils about him,—mouths once more
"*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*"
Then clasps-to cover, sends book spinning off
T' other side table, looks up, starts erect
Full-face with her who,—roused from that abstruse
Question, "*Will next tick tip the fern or no?*",—
Fronts him as fully.

All her languor breaks,
Away withers at once the weariness
From the black-blooded brow, anger and hate
Convulse. Speech follows slowlier, but at last—

"You here! I felt, I knew it would befall!
Knew, by some subtle undivinable
Trick of the trickster, I should, silly-sooth,
Late or soon, somehow be allured to leave
Safe hiding and come take of him arrears,
My torment due on four years' respite! Time
To pluck the bird's healed breast of down o'erwound!
Have your success! Be satisfied this sole
Seeing you has undone all heaven could do
These four years, puts me back to you and hell!
What will next trick be, next success? No doubt
When I shall think to glide into the grave,
There will you wait disguised as beckoning Death,
And catch and capture me for evermore!
But, God, though I am nothing, be thou all!
Contest him for me! Strive, for he is strong!"

Already his surprise dies palely out
In laugh of acquiescing impotence.
He neither gasps nor hisses: calm and plain—

"I also felt and knew—but otherwise!
You out of hand and sight and care of me
These four years, whom I felt, knew, all the while . . .
Oh, it 's no superstition! It 's a gift
O' the gamester that he snuffs the unseen powers
Which help or harm him. Well I knew what lurked,
Lay perdue paralysing me,—drugged, drowsed
And damnified my soul and body both!
Down and down, see where you have dragged me to,
You and your malice! I was, four years since,
—Well, a poor creature! I become a knave.
I squandered my own pence: I plump my purse
With other people's pounds. I practised play
Because I liked it: play turns labour now
Because there 's profit also in the sport.
I gamed with men of equal age and craft:
I steal here with a boy as green as grass
Whom I have tightened hold on slow and sure
This long while, just to bring about to-day
When the boy beats me hollow, buries me
In ruin who was sure to beggar him.
O time indeed I should look up and laugh
'*Surely she closes on me!*' Here you stand!"

And stand she does: while volubility,
With him, keeps on the increase, for his tongue
After long locking-up is loosed for once.

"Certain the taunt is happy!" he resumes:
"So, I it was allured you—only I
—I, and none other—to this spectacle—
Your triumph, my despair—you woman-fiend
That front me! Well, I have my wish, then! See
The low wide brow oppressed by sweeps of hair
Darker and darker as they coil and swathe
The crowned corpse-wanness whence the eyes burn black

Not asleep now! not pin-points dwarfed beneath
Either great bridging eyebrow—poor blank beads—
Babies, I 've pleased to pity in my time:
How they protrude and glow immense with hate!
The long triumphant nose attains—retains
Just the perfection; and there 's scarlet-skein
My ancient enemy, her lip and lip,
Sense-free, sense-frighting lips clenched cold and bold
Because of chin, that based resolve beneath!
Then the columnar neck completes the whole
Greek-sculpture-baffling body! Do I see?
Can I observe? You wait next word to come?
Well, wait and want! since no one blight I bid
Consume one least perfection. Each and all,
As they are rightly shocking now to me,
So may they still continue! Value them?
Ay, as the vendor knows the money-worth
Of his Greek statue, fools aspire to buy,
And he to see the back of! Let us laugh!
You have absolved me from my sin at least!
You stand stout, strong, in the rude health of hate,
No touch of the tame timid nullity
My cowardice, forsooth, has practised on!
Ay, while you seemed to hint some fine fifth act
Of tragedy should freeze blood, end the farce,
I never doubted all was joke. I kept,
May be, an eye alert on paragraphs,
Newspaper-notice,—let no inquest slip,
Accident, disappearance: sound and safe
Were you, my victim, not of mind to die!
So, my worst fancy that could spoil the smooth
Of pillow, and arrest descent of sleep
Was, *Into what dim hole can she have dived,*
She and her wrongs, her woe that 's wearing flesh

And blood away?' Whereas, see, sorrow swells!
Or, fattened, fulsome, have you fed on me,
Sucked out my substance? How much gloss, I pray,
O'erbloomed those hair-swathes when there crept from you
To me that craze, else unaccountable,
Which urged me to contest our county-seat
With whom but my own brother's nominee?
Did that mouth's pulp glow ruby from carmine
While I misused my moment, pushed,—one word,—
One hair's breadth more of gesture,—idiot-like
Past passion, floundered on to the grotesque,
And lost the heiress in a grin? At least,
You made no such mistake! You tickled fish,
Landed your prize the true artistic way!
How did the smug young curate rise to tune
Of '*Friend, a fatal fact divides us. Love*
Suits me no longer. I have suffered shame,
Betrayal: past is past; the future—yours—
Shall never be contaminate by mine.
I might have spared me this confession, not
—Oh, never by some hideousest of lies,
Easy, impenetrable! No! but say,
By just the quiet answer—"I am cold."
Falsehood avaunt, each shadow of thee, hence!
Had happier fortune willed . . . but dreams are vain.
Now, leave me—yes, for pity's sake!' Aha,
Who fails to see the curate as his face
Reddened and whitened, wanted handkerchief
At wrinkling brow and twinkling eye, until
Out burst the proper '*Angel, whom the fiend*
Has thought to smirch,—thy whiteness, at one wipe
Of holy cambric, shall disgrace the swan!
Mine be the task' . . . and so forth! Fool? not he!

Cunning in flavours, rather! What but sour
Suspected makes the sweetness doubly sweet,
And what stings love from faint to flamboyant
But the fear-sprinkle? Even horror helps—
'*Love's flame in me by such recited wrong*
Drenched, quenched, indeed? It burns the fiercelier thence!'
Why, I have known men never love their wives
Till somebody—myself, suppose—had '*drenched*
And quenched love,' so the blockheads whined: as if
The fluid fire that lifts the torpid limb
Were a wrong done to palsy. But I thrilled
No palsied person: half my age, or less,
The curate was, I 'll wager: o'er young blood
Your beauty triumphed! Eh, but—was it *he?*
Then, it *was* he, I heard of! None beside!
How frank you were about the audacious boy
Who fell upon you like a thunderbolt—
Passion and protestation! He it was
Reserved *in petto!* Ay, and '*rich*' beside—
'*Rich*'—how supremely did disdain curl nose!
All that I heard was—'*wedded to a priest;*'
Informants sunk youth, riches and the rest.
And so my lawless love disparted loves,
That loves might come together with a rush!
Surely this last achievement sucked me dry:
Indeed, that way my wits went. Mistress-queen,
Be merciful and let your subject slink
Into dark safety! He 's a beggar, see—
Do not turn back his ship, Australia-bound,
And bid her land him right amid some crowd
Of creditors, assembled by your curse!
Don't cause the very rope to crack (you can!)
Whereon he spends his last (friend's) sixpence, just
The moment when he hoped to hang himself!
Be satisfied you beat him!"

She replies—

"Beat him! I do. To all that you confess
Of abject failure, I extend belief.
Your very face confirms it: God is just!
Let my face—fix your eyes!—in turn confirm
What I shall say. All-abject 's but half truth;
Add to all-abject knave as perfect fool!
So is it you probed human nature, *so*
Prognosticated of me? Lay these words
To heart then, or where God meant heart should lurk!
That moment when you first revealed yourself,
My simple impulse prompted—end forthwith
The ruin of a life uprooted thus
To surely perish! How should such spoiled tree
Henceforward baulk the wind of its worst sport,
Fail to go falling deeper, falling down
From sin to sin until some depth were reached
Doomed to the weakest by the wickedest
Of weak and wicked human kind? But when,
That self-display made absolute,—behold
A new revealment!—round you pleased to veer,
Propose me what should prompt annul the past,
Make me '*amends by marriage*'—in your phrase,
Incorporate me henceforth, body and soul,
With soul and body which mere brushing past
Brought leprosy upon me—'*marry*' these!
Why, then despair broke, re-assurance dawned,
Clear-sighted was I that who hurled contempt
As I—thank God!—at the contemptible,
Was scarce an utter weakling. Rent away
By treason from my rightful pride of place,
I was not destined to the shame below.
A cleft had caught me: I might perish there,
But thence to be dislodged and whirled at last

Where the black torrent sweeps the sewage—no!
'*Bare breast be on hard rock*,' laughed out my soul
In gratitude, '*howe'er rock's grip may grind!*
The plain rough wretched holdfast shall suffice
This wreck of me!' The wind,—I broke in bloom
At passage of,—which stripped me bole and branch,
Twisted me up and tossed me here,—turns back,
And, playful ever, would replant the spoil?
Be satisfied, not one least leaf that 's mine
Shall henceforth help wind's sport to exercise!
Rather I give such remnant to the rock
Which never dreamed a straw would settle there.
Rock may not thank me, may not feel my breast,
Even: enough that *I* feel, hard and cold,
Its safety my salvation. Safe and saved,
I lived, live. When the tempter shall persuade
His prey to slip down, slide off, trust the wind,—
Now that I know if God or Satan be
Prince of the Power of the Air,—then, then, indeed,
Let my life end and degradation too!"

"Good!" he smiles, "true Lord Byron! '*Tree*
and rock:'
'*Rock*'—there 's advancement! He 's at first a
youth,
Rich, worthless therefore; next he grows a priest:
Youth, riches prove a notable resource,
When to leave me for their possessor gluts
Malice abundantly; and now, last change,
The young rich parson represents a rock
—Bloodstone, no doubt. He 's Evangelical?
Your Ritualists prefer the Church for spouse!"

She speaks.

"I have a story to relate.
There was a parish-priest, my father knew,

Elderly, poor : I used to pity him
Before I learned what woes are pity-worth.
Elderly was grown old now, scanty means
Were straitening fast to poverty, beside
The ailments which await in such a case.
Limited every way, a perfect man
Within the bounds built up and up since birth
Breast-high about him till the outside world
Was blank save o'erhead one blue bit of sky—
Faith : he had faith in dogma, small or great,
As in the fact that if he clave his skull
He 'd find a brain there : who proves such a fact
No falsehood by experiment at price
Of soul and body ? The one rule of life
Delivered him in childhood was '*Obey !*
Labour !' He had obeyed and laboured—tame,
True to the mill-track blinked on from above.
Some scholarship he may have gained in youth :
Gone—dropt or flung behind. Some blossom-flake,
Spring's boon, descends on every vernal head,
I used to think ; but January joins
December, as his year had known no May
Trouble its snow-deposit,—cold and old !
I heard it was his will to take a wife,
A helpmate. Duty bade him tend and teach—
How ? with experience null, nor sympathy
Abundant,—while himself worked dogma dead,
Who would play ministrant to sickness, age,
Womankind, childhood ? These demand a wife.
Supply the want, then ! theirs the wife ; for him—
No coarsest sample of the proper sex
But would have served his purpose equally
With God's own angel,—let but knowledge match
Her coarseness : zeal does only half the work.
I saw this—knew the purblind honest drudge
Was wearing out his simple blameless life,

And wanted help beneath a burthen—borne
To treasure-house or dust-heap, what cared I?
Partner he needed: I proposed myself,
Nor much surprised him—duty was so clear!
Gratitude? What for? Gain of Paradise—
Escape, perhaps, from the dire penalty
Of who hides talent in a napkin? No:
His scruple was—should I be strong enough
—In body? since of weakness in the mind,
Weariness in the heart—no fear of these!
He took me as these Arctic voyagers
Take an aspirant to their toil and pain:
Can he endure them?—that 's the point, and not
—Will he? Who would not, rather! Where-
upon,
I pleaded far more earnestly for leave
To give myself away, than you to gain
What you called priceless till you gained the heart
And soul and body! which, as beggars serve
Extorted alms, you straightway spat upon.
Not so my husband,—for I gained my suit,
And had my value put at once to proof.
Ask him! These four years I have died away
In village-life. The village? Ugliness
At best and filthiness at worst, inside.
Outside, sterility—earth sown with salt
Or what keeps even grass from growing fresh.
The life? I teach the poor and learn, myself,
That commonplace to such stupidity
Is all-recondite. Being brutalized
Their true need is brute-language, cheery grunts
And kindly cluckings, no articulate
Nonsense that 's elsewhere knowledge. Tend the
sick,
Sickened myself at pig-perversity,
Cat-craft dog-snarling,—may be, snapping . . ."

"Brief:
You eat that root of bitterness called Man
—Raw: I prefer it cooked, with social sauce!
So, he was not the rich youth after all!
Well, I mistook. But somewhere needs must be
The compensation. If not young nor rich . . ."

"You interrupt."

"Because you 've daubed enough
Bistre for background. Play the artist now,
Produce your figure well-relieved in front!
The contrast—do not I anticipate?
Though neither rich nor young—what then?
'T is all
Forgotten, all this ignobility,
In the dear home, the darling word, the smile,
The something sweeter . . ."

"Yes, you interrupt.
I have my purpose and proceed. Who lives
With beasts assumes beast-nature, look and voice,
And, much more, thought, for beasts think. Selfishness
In us met selfishness in them, deserved
Such answer as it gained. My husband, bent
On saving his own soul by saving theirs,—
They, bent on being saved if saving soul
Included body's getting bread and cheese
Somehow in life and somehow after death,—
Both parties were alike in the same boat,
One danger, therefore one equality.
Safety induces culture: culture seeks
To institute, extend and multiply
The difference between safe man and man,
Able to live alone now; progress means

What but abandonment of fellowship?
We were in common danger, still stuck close.
No new books,—were the old ones mastered yet?
No pictures and no music: these divert
—What from? the staving danger off! You paint
The waterspout above, you set to words
The roaring of the tempest round you? Thanks!
Amusement? Talk at end of the tired day
Of the more tiresome morrow! I transcribed
The page on page of sermon-scrawlings—stopped
Intellect's eye and ear to sense and sound—
Vainly: the sound and sense would penetrate
To brain and plague there in despite of me
Maddened to know more moral good were done
Had we two simply sallied forth and preached
I' the '*Green*' they call their grimy,—I with twang
Of long-disused guitar,—with cut and slash
Of much-misvalued horsewhip he,—to bid
The peaceable come dance, the peace-breaker
Pay in his person! Whereas—Heaven and Hell,
Excite with that, restrain with this! So dealt
His drugs my husband; as he dosed himself,
He drenched his cattle: and, for all my part
Was just to dub the mortar, never fear
But drugs, hand pestled at, have poisoned nose!
Heaven he let pass, left wisely undescribed:
As applicable therefore to the sleep
I want, that knows no waking—as to what 's
Conceived of as the proper prize to tempt
Souls less world-weary: there, no fault to find!
But Hell he made explicit. After death,
Life: man created new, ingeniously
Perfect for a vindictive purpose now
That man, first fashioned in beneficence,
Was proved a failure; intellect at length
Replacing old obtuseness, memory

Made mindful of delinquent's bygone deeds
Now that remorse was vain, which life-long lay
Dormant when lesson might be laid to heart;
New gift of observation up and down
And round man's self, new power to apprehend
Each necessary consequence of act
In man for well or ill—things obsolete—
Just granted to supplant the idiocy
Man's only guide while act was yet to choose,
With ill or well momentously its fruit;
A faculty of immense suffering
Conferred on mind and body,—mind, erewhile
Unvisited by one compunctious dream
During sin's drunken slumber, startled up,
Stung through and through by sin's significance
Now that the holy was abolished—just
As body which, alive, broke down beneath
Knowledge, lay helpless in the path to good,
Failed to accomplish aught legitimate,
Achieve aught worthy,—which grew old in youth,
And at its longest fell a cut-down flower,—
Dying, this too revived by miracle
To bear no end of burthen now that back
Supported torture to no use at all,
And live imperishably potent—since
Life's potency was impotent to ward
One plague off which made earth a hell before.
This doctrine, which one healthy view of things,
One sane sight of the general ordinance—
Nature,—and its particular object,—man,—
Which one mere eye-cast at the character
Of Who made these and gave man sense to boot,
Had dissipated once and evermore,—
This doctrine I have dosed our flock withal.
Why? Because none believed it. *They* desire
Such Heaven and dread such Hell, whom every day

The alehouse tempts from one, a dog-fight bids
Defy the other? All the harm is done
Ourselves—done my poor husband who in youth
Perhaps read Dickens, done myself who still
Could play both Bach and Brahms. Such life I lead—
Thanks to you, knave! You learn its quality—
Thanks to me, fool!"

He eyes her earnestly,
But she continues.

"—Life which, thanks once more
To you, arch-knave as exquisitest fool,
I acquiescingly—I gratefully
Take back again to heart! and hence this speech
Which yesterday had spared you. Four years long
Life—I began to find intolerable,
Only this moment. Ere your entry just,
The leap of heart which answered, spite of me.
A friend's first summons, first provocative,
Authoritative, nay, compulsive call
To quit, though for a single day, my house
Of bondage—made return seem horrible.
I heard again a human lucid laugh
All trust, no fear; again saw earth pursue
Its narrow busy way amid small cares,
Smaller contentments, much weeds, some few flowers,—
Never suspicious of a thunderbolt
Avenging presently each daisy's death.
I recognized the beech-tree, knew the thrush
Repeated his old music-phrase,—all right,
How wrong was I, then! But your entry broke
Illusion, bade me back to bounds at once.
I honestly submit my soul: which sprang
At love, and losing love lies signed and sealed

'*Failure.*' No love more? then, no beauty more
Which tends to breed love! Purify my powers,
Effortless till some other world procure
Some other chance of prize! or, if none be,—
Nor second world nor chance,—undesecrate
Die then this aftergrowth of heart, surmised
Where May's precipitation left June blank!
Better have failed in the high aim, as I,
Than vulgarly in the low aim succeed
As, God be thanked, I do not! Ugliness
Had I called beauty, falsehood—truth, and you
—My lover! No—this earth 's unchanged for me,
By his enchantment whom God made the Prince
O' the Power o' the Air, into a Heaven: there is
Heaven, since there is Heaven's simulation—earth.
I sit possessed in patience; prison-roof
Shall break one day and Heaven beam overhead."

His smile is done with; he speaks bitterly.

"Take my congratulations, and permit
I wish myself had proved as teachable!
—Or, no! until you taught me, could I learn
A lesson from experience ne'er till now
Conceded? Please you listen while I show
How thoroughly you estimate my worth
And yours—the immeasurably superior! I
Believed at least in one thing, first to last,—
Your love to me: I was the vile and you
The precious; I abused you, I betrayed,
But doubted—never! Why else go my way
Judas-like plodding to this Potter's Field
Where fate now finds me? What has dinned my ear
And dogged my step? The spectre with the shriek
'*Such she was, such were you, whose punishment*
Is just!' And such she was not, all the while!
She never owned a love to outrage, faith

To pay with falsehood! For, my heart knows this—
Love once and you love always. Why, it 's down
Here in the Album : every lover knows
Love may use hate but—turn to hate, itself—
Turn even to indifference—no, indeed !
Well, I have been spell-bound, deluded like
The witless negro by the Obeah-man
Who bids him wither : so, his eye grows dim,
His arm slack, arrow misses aim and spear
Goes wandering wide,—and all the woe because
He proved untrue to Fetish, who, he finds,
Was just a feather-phantom ! I wronged love,
Am ruined,—and there was no love to wrong !"

"No love? Ah, dead love! I invoke thy ghost
To show the murderer where thy heart poured life
At summons of the stroke he doubts was dealt
On pasteboard and pretence! Not love, my love?
I changed for you the very laws of life :
Made you the standard of all right, all fair.
No genius but you could have been, no sage,
No sufferer—which is grandest—for the truth !
My hero—where the heroic only hid
To burst from hiding, brighten earth one day !
Age and decline were man's maturity ;
Face, form were nature's type : more grace, more
strength,
What had they been but just superfluous gauds,
Lawless divergence? I have danced through day
On tiptoe at the music of a word,
Have wondered where was darkness gone as night
Burst out in stars at brilliance of a smile !
Lonely, I placed the chair to help me seat
Your fancied presence ; in companionship,
I kept my finger constant to your glove
Glued to my breast; then—where was all the world?

I schemed—not dreamed—how I might die some
death
Should save your finger aching! Who creates
Destroys, he only: I had laughed to scorn
Whatever angel tried to shake my faith
And make you seem unworthy: you yourself
Only could do that! With a touch 't was done.
'*Give me all, trust me wholly!*' At the word,
I did give, I did trust—and thereupon
The touch did follow. Ah, the quiet smile,
The masterfully-folded arm in arm,
As trick obtained its triumph one time more!
In turn, my soul too triumphs in defeat:
Treason like faith moves mountains: love is gone!"

He paces to and fro, stops, stands quite close
And calls her by her name. Then—

"God forgives:
Forgive you, delegate of God, brought near
As never priests could bring him to this soul
That prays you both—forgive me! I abase—
Know myself mad and monstrous utterly
In all I did that moment; but as God
Gives me this knowledge—heart to feel and tongue
To testify—so be you gracious too!
Judge no man by the solitary work
Of—well, they do say and I can believe—
The devil in him: his, the moment,—mine
The life—your life!"

He names her name again.

"You were just—merciful as just, you were
In giving me no respite: punishment
Followed offending. Sane and sound once more,

The patient thanks decision, promptitude,
Which flung him prone and fastened him from hurt,
Haply to others, surely to himself.
I wake and would not you had spared one pang.
All 's well that ends well ! "

Yet again her name.

" Had *you* no fault ? Why must you change, forsooth,
Parts, why reverse positions, spoil the play ?
Why did your nobleness look up to me,
Not down on the ignoble thing confessed ?
Was it your part to stoop, or lift the low ?
Wherefore did God exalt you ? Who would teach
The brute man's tameness and intelligence
Must never drop the dominating eye :
Wink—and what wonder if the mad fit break,
Followed by stripes and fasting ? Sound and sane,
My life, chastised now, couches at your foot.
Accept, redeem me ! Do your eyes ask '*How ?*'
I stand here penniless, a beggar ; talk
What idle trash I may, this final blow
Of fortune fells me. *I* disburse, indeed,
This boy his winnings ? when each bubble-scheme
That danced athwart my brain, a minute since,
The worse the better,—of repairing straight
My misadventure by fresh enterprise,
Capture of other boys in foolishness
His fellows,—when these fancies fade away
At first sight of the lost so long, the found
So late, the lady of my life, before
Whose presence I, the lost, am also found
Incapable of one least touch of mean
Expedient, I who teemed with plot and wile—
That family of snakes your eye bids flee !

Listen! Our troublesomest dreams die off
In daylight: I awake, and dream is—where?
I rouse up from the past: one touch dispels
England and all here. I secured long since
A certain refuge, solitary home
To hide in, should the head strike work one day,
The hand forget its cunning, or perhaps
Society grow savage,—there to end
My life's remainder, which, say what fools will,
Is or should be the best of life,—its fruit,
All tends to, root and stem and leaf and flower.
Come with me, love, loved once, loved only, come,
Blend loves there! Let this parenthetic doubt
Of love, in me, have been the trial-test
Appointed to all flesh at some one stage
Of soul's achievement,—when the strong man doubts
His strength, the good man whether goodness be,
The artist in the dark seeks, fails to find
Vocation, and the saint forswears his shrine.
What if the lover may elude, no more
Than these, probative dark, must search the sky
Vainly for love, his soul's star? But the orb
Breaks from eclipse: I breathe again: I love!
Tempted, I fell; but fallen—fallen lie
Here at your feet, see! Leave this poor pretence
Of union with a nature and its needs
Repugnant to your needs and nature! Nay,
False, beyond falsity you reprehend
In me, is such mock marriage with such mere
Man-mask as—whom you witless wrong, beside,
By that expenditure of heart and brain
He recks no more of than would yonder tree
If watered with your life-blood: rains and dews
Answer its ends sufficiently, while me
One drop saves—sends to flower and fruit at last

The laggard virtue in the soul which else
Cumbers the ground! Quicken me! Call me
yours—
Yours and the world's—yours and the world's and
God's!
Yes, for you can, you only! Think! Confirm
Your instinct! Say, a minute since, I seemed
The castaway you count me,—all the more
Apparent shall the angelic potency
Lift me from out perdition's deep of deeps
To light and life and love!—that 's love for you—
Love that already dares match might with yours.
You loved one worthy,—in your estimate,—
When time was; you descried the unworthy taint,
And where was love then? No such test could e'er
Try my love: but you hate me and revile;
Hatred, revilement—had you these to bear
Would you, as I do, nor revile, nor hate,
But simply love on, love the more, perchance?
Abide by your own proof! '*Your love was love:*
Its ghost knows no forgetting!' Heart of mine,
Would that I dared remember! Too unwise
Were he who lost a treasure, did himself
Enlarge upon the sparkling catalogue
Of gems to her his queen who trusted late
The keeper of her caskets! Can it be
That I, custodian of such relic still
As your contempt permits me to retain,
All I dare hug to breast is—'*How your glove*
Burst and displayed the long thin lily-streak!'
What may have followed—that is forfeit now!
I hope the proud man has grown humble. True—
One grace of humbleness absents itself—
Silence! yet love lies deeper than all words,
And not the spoken but the speechless love
Waits answer ere I rise and go my way."

Whereupon, yet one other time the name.

To end she looks the large deliberate look,
Even prolongs it somewhat; then the soul
Bursts forth in a clear laugh that lengthens on,
On, till—thinned, softened, silvered, one might say
The bitter runnel hides itself in sand,
Moistens the hard grey grimly comic speech.

"Ay—give the baffled angler even yet
His supreme triumph as he hales to shore
A second time the fish once 'scaped from hook:
So artfully has new bait hidden old
Blood-imbrued iron! Ay, no barb 's beneath
The gilded minnow here! You bid break trust,
This time, with who trusts me,—not simply bid
Me trust you, me who ruined but myself,
In trusting but myself! Since, thanks to you,
I know the feel of sin and shame,—be sure,
I shall obey you and impose them both
On one who happens to be ignorant
Although my husband—for the lure is love,
Your love! Try other tackle, fisher-friend!
Repentance, expiation, hopes and fears,
What you had been, may yet be, would I but
Prove helpmate to my hero—one and all
These silks and worsteds round the hook seduce
Hardly the late torn throat and mangled tongue.
Pack up, I pray, the whole assortment prompt!
Who wonders at variety of wile
In the Arch-cheat? You are the Adversary!
Your fate is of your choosing: have your choice!
Wander the world,—God has some end to serve
Ere he suppress you! He waits: I endure,
But interpose no finger-tip, forsooth,
To stop your passage to the pit. Enough

That I am stable, uninvolved by you
In the rush downwards: free I gaze and fixed;
Your smiles, your tears, prayers, curses move alike
My crowned contempt. You kneel? Prostrate yourself!
To earth, and would the whole world saw you there!"

Whereupon—"All right!" carelessly begins
Somebody from outside, who mounts the stair,
And sends his voice for herald of approach:
Half in half out the doorway as the door
Gives way to push.

"Old fellow, all 's no good!
The train 's your portion! Lay the blame on me!
I 'm no diplomatist, and Bismarck's self
Had hardly braved the awful Aunt at broach
Of proposition—so has world-repute
Preceded the illustrious stranger! Ah!—"

Quick the voice changes to astonishment,
Then horror, as the youth stops, sees, and knows.

The man who knelt starts up from kneeling, stands
Moving no muscle, and confronts the stare.

One great red outbreak buries—throat and brow—
The lady's proud pale queenliness of scorn:
Then her great eyes that turned so quick, become
Intenser: quail at gaze, not they indeed!

V

It is the young man shatters silence first.

"Well, my lord—for indeed my lord you are,
I little guessed how rightly—this last proof
Of lordship-paramount confounds too much
My simple head-piece! Let 's see how we stand
Each to the other! how we stood i' the game
Of life an hour ago,—the magpies, stile
And oak-tree witnessed. Truth exchanged for truth—
My lord confessed his four-years-old affair—
How he seduced and then forsook the girl
Who married somebody and left him sad.
My pitiful experience was—I loved
A girl whose gown's hem had I dared to touch
My finger would have failed me, palsy-fixed.
She left me, sad enough, to marry—whom?
A better man,—then possibly not you!
How does the game stand? Who is who and what
Is what, o' the board now, since an hour went by?
My lord's '*seduced, forsaken, sacrificed,*'
Starts up, my lord's familiar instrument,
Associate and accomplice, mistress-slave—
Shares his adventure, follows on the sly!
—Ay, and since 'bag and baggage' is a phrase—
Baggage lay hid in carpet-bag belike,
Was but unpadlocked when occasion came
For holding council, since my back was turned,
On how invent ten thousand pounds which, paid,
Would lure the winner to lose twenty more,
Beside refunding these! Why else allow
The fool to gain them? So displays herself
The lady whom my heart believed—oh, laugh!

Noble and pure: whom my heart loved at once,
And who at once did speak truth when she said
'*I am not mine now but another's*'—thus
Being that other's! Devil's-marriage, eh?
'*My lie weds thine till lucre us do part?*'
But pity me the snobbish simpleton,
You two aristocratic tip-top swells
At swindling! Quits, I cry! Decamp content
With skin I 'm peeled of: do not strip bones bare—
As that you could, I have no doubt at all!
O you two rare ones! Male and female, Sir!
The male there smirked, this morning, '*Come, my boy*—
Out with it! You 've been crossed in love, I think:
I recognize the lover's hangdog look;
Make a clean breast and match my confidence,
For, I 'll be frank, I too have had my fling,
Am punished for my fault, and smart enough!
Where now the victim hides her head, God knows!'
Here loomed her head life-large, the devil knew!
Look out, Salvini! Here 's your man, your match!
He and I sat applauding, stall by stall,
Last Monday—'*Here 's Othello*' was our word,
'*But where 's Iago?*' Where? Why, there! And now
The fellow-artist, female specimen—
Oh, lady, you must needs describe yourself!
He 's great in art, but you—how greater still
—(If I can rightly, out of all I learned,
Apply one bit of Latin that assures
'*Art means just art's concealment*')—tower yourself!
For he stands plainly visible henceforth—
Liar and scamp: while you, in artistry
Prove so consummate—or I prove perhaps
So absolute an ass—that—either way—

You still do seem to me who worshipped you
And see you take the homage of this man
Your master, who played slave and knelt, no doubt,
Before a mistress in his very craft . . .
Well, take the fact, I nor believe my eyes,
Nor trust my understanding ! Still you seem
Noble and pure as when we had the talk
Under the tower, beneath the trees, that day.
And there 's the key explains the secret : down
He knelt to ask your leave to rise a grade
I' the mystery of humbug : well he may !
For how you beat him ! Half an hour ago,
I held your master for my best of friends ;
And now I hate him ! Four years since, you seemed
My heart's one love : well, and you so remain !
What 's he to you in craft ?"

She looks him through.

"My friend, 't is just that friendship have its turn—
Interrogate thus me whom one, of foes
The worst, has questioned and is answered by.
Take you as frank an answer ! answers both
Begin alike so far, divergent soon
World-wide—I own superiority
Over you, over him. As him I searched,
So do you stand seen through and through by me
Who, this time, proud, report your crystal shrines
A dewdrop, plain as amber prisons round
A spider in the hollow heart his house !
Nowise are you that thing my fancy feared
When out you stepped on me, a minute since,
—This man's confederate ! no, you step not thus
Obsequiously at beck and call to help

At need some second scheme, and supplement
Guile by force, use my shame to pinion me
From struggle and escape! I fancied that!
Forgive me! Only by strange chance,—most
strange
In even this strange world,—you enter now,
Obtain your knowledge. Me you have not wronged
Who never wronged you—least of all, my friend,
That day beneath the College tower and trees,
When I refused to say,—'*not friend but, love!*'
Had I been found as free as air when first
We met, I scarcely could have loved you. No—
For where was that in you which claimed return
Of love? My eyes were all too weak to probe
This other's seeming, but that seeming loved
The soul in me, and lied—I know too late!
While your truth was truth: and I knew at once
My power was just my beauty—bear the word—
As I must bear, of all my qualities,
To name the poorest one that serves my soul
And simulates myself! So much in me
You loved, I know: the something that 's beneath
Heard not your call,—uncalled, no answer comes!
For, since in every love, or soon or late
Soul must awake and seek out soul for soul,
Yours, overlooking mine then, would, some day,
Take flight to find some other; so it proved—
Missing me, you were ready for this man.
I apprehend the whole relation: his—
The soul wherein you saw your type of worth
At once, true object of your tribute. Well
Might I refuse such half-heart's homage! Love
Divining, had assured you I no more
Stand his participant in infamy
Than you—I need no love to recognize
As simply dupe and nowise fellow-cheat!

Therefore accept one last friend's-word,—your
friend's,
All men's friend, save a felon's. Ravel out
The bad embroilment howsoe'er you may,
Distribute as it please you praise or blame
To me—so you but fling this mockery far—
Renounce this rag-and-feather hero-sham,
This poodle clipt to pattern, lion-like!
Throw him his thousands back, and lay to heart
The lesson I was sent,—if man discerned
Ever God's message,—just to teach. I judge—
To far another issue than could dream
Your cousin,—younger, fairer, as befits—
Who summoned me to judgment's exercise.
I find you, save in folly, innocent.
And in my verdict lies your fate; at choice
Of mine your cousin takes or leaves you. '*Take!*'
I bid her—for you tremble back to truth.
She turns the scale,—one touch of the pure hand
Shall so press down, emprison past relapse
Farther vibration 'twixt veracity—
That 's honest solid earth—and falsehood, theft
And air, that 's one illusive emptiness!
That reptile capture you? I conquered him:
You saw him cower before me. Have no fear
He shall offend you farther! Spare to spurn—
Safe let him slink hence till some subtler Eve
Than I, anticipate the snake—bruise head
Ere he bruise heel—or, warier than the first,
Some Adam purge earth's garden of its pest
Before the slaver spoil the Tree of Life!
"You! Leave this youth, as he leaves you, as I
Leave each! There 's caution surely extant yet
Though conscience in you were too vain a claim.
Hence quickly! Keep the cash but leave unsoiled

The heart I rescue and would lay to heal
Beside another's! Never let her know
How near came taint of your companionship!"

"Ah"—draws a long breath with a new strange look
The man she interpellates—soul a-stir
Under its covert, as, beneath the dust,
A coppery sparkle all at once denotes
The hid snake has conceived a purpose.

"Ah—
Innocence should be crowned with ignorance?
Desirable indeed, but difficult!
As if yourself, now, had not glorified
Your helpmate by imparting him a hint
Of how a monster made the victim bleed
Ere crook and courage saved her—hint, I say,—
Not the whole horror,—that were needless risk,—
But just such inkling, fancy of the fact,
As should suffice to qualify henceforth
The shepherd, when another lamb would stray,
For warning '*Ware the wolf!*' No doubt at all,
Silence is generosity,—keeps wolf
Unhunted by flock's warder! Excellent,
Did—generous to me, mean—just to him!
But, screening the deceiver, lamb were found
Outraging the deceitless! So,—he knows!
And yet, unharmed I breathe—perchance, repent—
Thanks to the mercifully-politic!"

"Ignorance is not innocence but sin—
Witness yourself ignore what after-pangs
Pursue the plague-infected. Merciful
Am I? Perhaps! The more contempt, the less
Hatred; and who so worthy of contempt
As you that rest assured I cooled the spot

I could not cure, by poisoning, forsooth,
Whose hand I pressed there? Understand for once
That, sick, of all the pains corroding me
This burnt the last and nowise least—the need
Of simulating soundness. I resolved—
No matter how the struggle tasked weak flesh—
To hide the truth away as in a grave
From—most of all—my husband: he nor knows
Nor ever shall be made to know your part,
My part, the devil's part,—I trust, God's part
In the foul matter. Saved, I yearn to save
And not destroy: and what destruction like
The abolishing of faith in him, that 's faith
In me as pure and true? Acquaint some child
Who takes yon tree into his confidence,
That, where he sleeps now, was a murder done,
And that the grass which grows so thick, he thinks,
Only to pillow him is product just
Of what lies festering beneath! 'T is God
Must bear such secrets and disclose them. Man?
The miserable thing I have become
By dread acquaintance with my secret—*you*—
That thing had he become by learning *me*—
The miserable, whom his ignorance
Would wrongly call the wicked: ignorance
Being, I hold, sin ever, small or great.
No, he knows nothing!"

"He and I alike
Are bound to you for such discreetness, then.
What if our talk should terminate awhile?
Here is a gentleman to satisfy,
Settle accounts with, pay ten thousand pounds
Before we part—as, by his face, I fear,
Results from your appearance on the scene.
Grant me a minute's parley with my friend

Which scarce admits of a third personage!
The room from which you made your entry first
So opportunely—still untenanted—
What if you please return there? Just a word
To my young friend first—then, a word to you,
And you depart to fan away each fly
From who, grass-pillowed, sleeps so sound at home!"

"So the old truth comes back! A wholesome change,—
At last the altered eye, the rightful tone!
But even to the truth that drops disguise
And stands forth grinning malice which but now
Whined so contritely—I refuse assent
Just as to malice. I, once gone, come back?
No, my lord! I enjoy the privilege
Of being absolutely loosed from you
Too much—the knowledge that your power is null
Which was omnipotence. A word of mouth,
A wink of eye would have detained me once,
Body and soul your slave; and now, thank God,
Your fawningest of prayers, your frightfulest
Of curses—neither would avail to turn
My footstep for a moment!"

"Prayer, then, tries
No such adventure. Let us cast about
For something novel in expedient: take
Command,—what say you? I profess myself
One fertile in resource. Commanding, then,
I bid—not only wait there, but return
Here, where I want you! Disobey and—good!
On your own head the peril!"

"Come!" breaks in
The boy with his good glowing face. "Shut up!

None of this sort of thing while I stand here
—Not to stand that! No bullying, I beg!
I also am to leave you presently
And never more set eyes upon your face—
You won't mind that much; but—I tell you frank—
I do mind having to remember this
For your last word and deed—my friend who were!
Bully a woman you have ruined, eh?
Do you know,—I give credit all at once
To all those stories everybody told
And nobody but I would disbelieve:
They all seem likely now,—nay, certain, sure!
I dare say you did cheat at cards that night
The row was at the Club: '*sauter la coupe*'—
That was your 'cut,' for which your friends 'cut' you;
While I, the booby, 'cut'—acquaintanceship
With who so much as laughed when I said '*luck!*'
I dare say you had bets against the horse
They doctored at the Derby; little doubt,
That fellow with the sister found you shirk
His challenge and did kick you like a ball,
Just as the story went about! Enough:
It only serves to show how well advised,
Madam, you were in bidding such a fool
As I, go hang. You see how the mere sight
And sound of you suffice to tumble down
Conviction topsy-turvy: no,—that 's false,—
There 's no unknowing what one knows; and yet
Such is my folly that, in gratitude
For . . . well, I 'm stupid; but you seemed to wish
I should know gently what I know, should slip
Softly from old to new, not break my neck
Between beliefs of what you were and are.
Well then, for just the sake of such a wish
To cut no worse a figure than needs must
In even eyes like mine, I 'd sacrifice

Body and soul! But don't think danger—pray!—
Menaces either! He do harm to us?
Let me say 'us' this one time! You 'd allow
I lent perhaps my hand to rid your ear
Of some cur's yelping—hand that 's fortified,
Into the bargain, with a horsewhip? Oh,
One crack and you shall see how curs decamp!
My lord, you know your losses and my gains.
Pay me my money at the proper time!
If cash be not forthcoming,—well, yourself
Have taught me, and tried often, I 'll engage,
The proper course: I post you at the Club,
Pillory the defaulter. Crack, to-day,
Shall, slash, to-morrow, slice through flesh and bone!
There, Madam, you need mind no cur, I think!"

"Ah, what a gain to have an apt no less
Than grateful scholar! Nay, he brings to mind
My knowledge till he puts me to the blush,
So long has it lain rusty! Post my name!
That were indeed a wheal from whipcord! Whew!
I wonder now if I could rummage out
—Just to match weapons—some old scorpion-
scourge!
Madam, you hear my pupil, may applaud
His triumph o'er the master. I—no more
Bully, since I 'm forbidden: but entreat—
Wait and return—for my sake, no! but just
To save your own defender, should he chance
Get thwacked thro' awkward flourish of his thong.
And what if—since all waiting 's weary work—
I help the time pass 'twixt your exit now
And entry then? for—pastime proper—here 's
The very thing, the Album, verse and prose
To make the laughing minutes launch away!
Each of us must contribute. I 'll begin—

'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
I 'm confident I beat the bard,—for why?
My young friend owns me an Iago—him
Confessed, among the other qualities,
A ready rhymer. Oh, he rhymed! Here goes!
—Something to end with '*horsewhip!*' No, that rhyme
Beatsme; there 's '*cowslip*,' '*boltsprit*,' nothing else!
So, Tennyson take my benison,—verse for bard,
Prose suits the gambler's book best! Dared and done!"

Wherewith he dips pen, writes a line or two,
Closes and clasps the cover, gives the book,
Bowing the while, to her who hesitates,
Turns half away, turns round again, at last
Takes it as you touch carrion, then retires.
The door shuts fast the couple.

VI

With a change
Of his whole manner, opens out at once
The Adversary.

"Now, my friend, for you!
You who, protected late, aggressive grown,
Brandish, it seems, a weapon I must 'ware!
Plain speech in me becomes respectable
Henceforth, because courageous; plainly, then—
(Have lash well loose, hold handle tight and light!)
Throughout my life's experience, you indulged
Yourself and friend by passing in review
So courteously but now, I vainly search
To find one record of a specimen
So perfect of the pure and simple fool
As this you furnish me. Ingratitude

I lump with folly,—all 's one lot,—so—fool!
Did I seek you or you seek me? Seek? sneak
For service to, and service you would style—
And did style—godlike, scarce an hour ago!
Fool, there again, yet not precisely there
First-rate in folly: since the hand you kissed
Did pick you from the kennel, did plant firm
Your footstep on the pathway, did persuade
Your awkward shamble to true gait and pace,
Fit for the world you walk in. Once a-strut
On that firm pavement which your cowardice
Was for renouncing as a pitfall, next
Came need to clear your brains of their conceit
They cleverly could distinguish who was who,
Whatever folk might tramp the thoroughfare.
Men, now—familiarly you read them off,
Each phyz at first sight! O you had an eye!
Who couched it? made you disappoint each fox
Eager to strip my gosling of his fluff
So golden as he cackled 'Goose trusts lamb?'
'*Ay, but I saved you—wolf defeated fox—*
Wanting to pick your bones myself!' then, wolf
Has got the worst of it with goose for once.
I, penniless, pay you ten thousand pounds
(—No gesture, pray! I pay ere I depart.)
And how you turn advantage to account
Here 's the example. Have I proved so wrong
In my peremptory '*debt must be discharged?*'
O you laughed lovelily, were loth to leave
The old friend out at elbows—pooh, a thing
Not to be thought of! I must keep my cash,
And you forget your generosity!
Ha ha, I took your measure when I laughed
My laugh to that! First quarrel—nay, first faint
Pretence at taking umbrage—'*Down with debt,*
Both interest and principal!—*The Club*,

Exposure and expulsion !—stamp me out !'
That 's the magnanimous magnificent
Renunciation of advantage ! Well,
But whence and why did you take umbrage, Sir ?
Because your master, having made you know
Somewhat of men, was minded to advance,
Expound you women, still a mystery !
My pupil pottered with a cloud on brow,
A clod in breast : had loved, and vainly loved :
Whence blight and blackness, just for all the world
As Byron used to teach us boys. Thought I—
'*Quick rid him of that rubbish ! Clear the cloud,*
And set the heart a-pulsing !'—heart, this time :
'T was nothing but the head I doctored late
For ignorance of Man ; now heart 's to dose,
Palsied by over-palpitation due
To Woman-worship—so, to work at once
On first avowal of the patient's ache !
This morning you described your malady,—
How you dared love a piece of virtue—lost
To reason, as the upshot showed : for scorn
Fitly repaid your stupid arrogance ;
And, parting, you went two ways, she resumed
Her path—perfection, while forlorn you paced
The world that 's made for beasts like you and me.
My remedy was—tell the fool the truth !
Your paragon of purity had plumped
Into these arms at their first outspread—'*fallen*
My victim,' she prefers to turn the phrase—
And, in exchange for that frank confidence,
Asked for my whole life present and to come—
Marriage : a thing uncovenanted for,
Never so much as put in question. Life—
Implied by marriage—throw that trifle in
And round the bargain off, no otherwise
Than if, when we played cards, because you won

My money you should also want my head!
That, I demurred to: we but played '*for love*'—
She won my love; had she proposed for stakes
'*Marriage*,'—why, that 's for whist, a wiser game.
Whereat she raved at me, as losers will,
And went her way. So far the story 's known,
The remedy 's applied, no farther: which
Here 's the sick man's first *honorarium* for—
Posting his medicine-monger at the Club!
That being, Sir, the whole you mean my fee—
In gratitude for such munificence
I 'm bound in common honesty to spare
No droplet of the draught: so,—pinch your nose,
Pull no wry faces!—drain it to the dregs!
I say '*She went off*'—'*went off*,' you subjoin,
'*Since not to wedded bliss, as I supposed,*
Sure to some convent: solitude and peace
Help her to hide the shame from mortal view,
With prayer and fasting.' No, my sapient Sir!
Far wiselier, straightway she betook herself
To a prize-portent from the donkey-show
Of leathern long-ears that compete for palm
In clerical absurdity: since he,
Good ass, nor practises the shaving-trick,
The candle-crotchet, nonsense which repays
When you 've young ladies congregant,—but schools
The poor,—toils, moils and grinds the mill nor means
To stop and munch one thistle in this life
Till next life smother him with roses: just
The parson for her purpose! Him she stroked
Over the muzzle; into mouth with bit,
And on to back with saddle,—there he stood,
The serviceable beast who heard, believed
And meekly bowed him to the burden,—borne

Off in a canter to seclusion—ay,
The lady 's lost! But had a friend of mine
—While friend he was—imparted his sad case
To sympathizing counsellor, full soon
One cloud at least had vanished from his brow.
'*Don't fear!*' had followed reassuringly—
'*The lost will in due time turn up again,*
Probably just when, weary of the world,
You think of nothing less than settling-down
To country life and golden days, beside
A dearest best and brightest virtuousest
Wife: who needs no more hope to hold her own
Against the naughty-and-repentant—no,
Than water-gruel against Roman punch!'
And as I prophesied, it proves! My youth,—
Just at the happy moment when, subdued
To spooniness, he finds that youth fleets fast,
That town-life tires, that men should drop boys'-play,
That property, position have, no doubt,
Their exigency with their privilege,
And if the wealthy wed with wealth, how dire
The double duty!—in, behold, there beams
Our long-lost lady, form and face complete!
And where 's my moralizing pupil now,
Had not his master missed a train by chance?
But, by your side instead of whirled away,
How have I spoiled scene, stopped catastrophe,
Struck flat the stage-effect I know by heart!
Sudden and strange the meeting—improvised?
Bless you, the last event she hoped or dreamed!
But rude sharp stroke will crush out fire from flint—
Assuredly from flesh. ''*T is you?*' '*Myself.*'
'*Changed?*' '*Changeless.*' '*Then, what 's earth to me?*' '*To me*
What 's heaven?' '*So,—thine!*' '*And thine!*' '*And likewise mine!*'

Had laughed '*Amen*' the devil, but for me
Whose intermeddling hinders this hot haste,
And bids you, ere concluding contract, pause—
Ponder one lesson more, then sign and seal
At leisure and at pleasure,—lesson's price
Being, if you have skill to estimate,
—How say you?—I'm discharged my debt in full!
Since paid you stand, to farthing uttermost,
Unless I fare like that black majesty
A friend of mine had visit from last Spring.
Coasting along the Cape-side, he 's becalmed
Off an uncharted bay, a novel town
Untouched at by the trader : here 's a chance!
Out paddles straight the king in his canoe,
Comes over bulwark, says he means to buy
Ship's cargo—being rich and having brought
A treasure ample for the purpose. See!
Four dragons, stalwart blackies, guard the same
Wrapped round and round: its hulls, a multitude,—
Palm-leaf and cocoa-mat and goat's-hair cloth
All duly braced about with bark and board,—
Suggest how brave, 'neath coat, must kernel be!
At length the peeling is accomplished, plain
The casket opens out its core, and lo
—A brand-new British silver sixpence—bid
That 's ample for the Bank,—thinks majesty!
You are the Captain ; call my sixpence cracked
Or copper ; '*what I 've said is calumny ;*
The lady 's spotless!' Then, I 'll prove my words,
Or make you prove them true as truth—yourself,
Here, on the instant! I 'll not mince my speech,
Things at this issue. When she enters, then,
Make love to her! No talk of marriage now—
The point-blank bare proposal! Pick no phrase—
Prevent all misconception! Soon you 'll see
How different the tactics when she deals

With an instructed man, no longer boy
Who blushes like a booby. Woman's wit!
Man, since you have instruction, blush no more!
Such your five minutes' profit by my pains,
'T is simply now—demand and be possessed!
Which means—you may possess—may strip the tree
Of fruit desirable to make one wise.
More I nor wish nor want: your act 's your act,
My teaching is but—there 's the fruit to pluck
Or let alone at pleasure. Next advance
In knowledge were beyond you! Don't expect
I bid a novice—pluck, suck, send sky-high
Such fruit, once taught that neither crab nor sloe
Falls readier prey to who but robs a hedge,
Than this gold apple to my Hercules.
Were you no novice but proficient—then,
Then, truly, I might prompt you—Touch and taste,
Try flavour and be tired as soon as I!
Toss on the prize to greedy mouths agape,
Betake yours, sobered as the satiate grow,
To wise man's solid meal of house and land,
Consols and cousin! but my boy, my boy,
Such lore 's above you!

Here 's the lady back!
So, Madam, you have conned the Album-page
And come to thank its last contributor?
How kind and condescending! I retire
A moment, lest I spoil the interview,
And mar my own endeavour to make friends—
You with him, him with you, and both with me!
If I succeed—permit me to inquire
Five minutes hence! Friends bid good-bye, you know.'
And out he goes.

VII

She, face, form, bearing, one
Superb composure—

" He has told you all ?
Yes, he has told you all, your silence says—
What gives him, as he thinks the mastery
Over my body and my soul !—has told
That instance, even, of their servitude
He now exacts of me ? A silent blush !
That 's well, though better would white ignorance
Beseem your brow, undesecrate before—
Ay, when I left you ! I too learn at last
—Hideously learned as I seemed so late—
What sin may swell to. Yes,—I needed learn
That, when my prophet's rod became the snake
I fled from, it would, one day, swallow up
—Incorporate whatever serpentine
Falsehood and treason and unmanliness
Beslime earth's pavement: such the power of Hell,
And so beginning, ends no otherwise
The Adversary ! I was ignorant,
Blameworthy—if you will ; but blame I take
Nowise upon me as I ask myself
—*You*—how can you, whose soul I seemed to read
The limpid eyes through, have declined so deep
Even with him for consort ? I revolve
Much memory, pry into the looks and words
Of that day's walk beneath the College wall,
And nowhere can distinguish, in what gleams
Only pure marble through my dusky past,
A dubious cranny where such poison-seed
Might harbour, nourish what should yield to-day
This dread ingredient for the cup I drink.

Do not I recognize and honour truth
In seeming?—take your truth and for return,
Give you my truth, a no less precious gift?
You loved me: I believed you. I replied
—How could I other? '*I was not my own*,'
—No longer had the eyes to see, the ears
To hear, the mind to judge, since heart and soul
Now were another's. My own right in me,
For well or ill, consigned away—my face
Fronted the honest path, deflection whence
Had shamed me in the furtive backward look
At the late bargain—fit such chapman's phrase!—
As though—less hasty and more provident—
Waiting had brought advantage. Not for me
The chapman's chance! Yet while thus much was true,
I spared you—as I knew you then—one more
Concluding word which, truth no less, seemed best
Buried away for ever. Take it now
Its power to pain is past! Four years—that day—
Those limes that make the College avenue!
I would that—friend and foe—by miracle,
I had, that moment, seen into the heart
Of either, as I now am taught to see!
I do believe I should have straight assumed
My proper function, and sustained a soul,
Nor aimed at being just sustained myself
By some man's soul—the weaker woman's-want!
So had I missed the momentary thrill
Of finding me in presence of a god,
But gained the god's own feeling when he gives
Such thrill to what turns life from death before.
'*Gods many and Lords many*,' says the Book:
You would have yielded up your soul to me
—Not to the false god who has burned its clay
In his own image. I had shed my love

Like Spring dew on the clod all flowery thence,
Not sent up a wild vapour to the sun
That drinks and then disperses. Both of us
Blameworthy,—I first meet my punishment—
And not so hard to bear. I breathe again!
Forth from those arms' enwinding leprosy
At last I struggle—uncontaminate:
Why must I leave *you* pressing to the breast
That's all one plague-spot? Did you love me once?
Then take love's last and best return! I think,
Womanliness means only motherhood;
All love begins and ends there,—roams enough,
But, having run the circle, rests at home.
Why is your expiation yet to make?
Pull shame with your own hands from your own head
Now,—never wait the slow envelopment
Submitted to by unelastic age!
One fierce throe frees the sapling: flake on flake
Lull till they leave the oak snow-stupefied.
Your heart retains its vital warmth—or why
That blushing reassurance? Blush, young blood!
Break from beneath this icy premature
Captivity of wickedness—I warn
Back, in God's name! No fresh encroachment here!
This May breaks all to bud—no Winter now!
Friend, we are both forgiven! Sin no more!
I am past sin now, so shall you become!
Meanwhile I testify that, lying once,
My foe lied ever, most lied last of all.
He, waking, whispered to your sense asleep
The wicked counsel,—and assent might seem;
But, roused, your healthy indignation breaks
The idle dream-pact. You would die—not dare
Confirm your dream-resolve,—nay, find the word

That fits the deed to bear the light of day !
Say I have justly judged you ! then farewell
To blushing—nay, it ends in smiles, not tears !
Why tears now? I have justly judged, thank
God !"

He does blush boy-like, but the man speaks out,
—Makes the due effort to surmount himself.

"I don't know what he wrote—how should I? Nor
How he could read my purpose which, it seems,
He chose to somehow write—mistakenly
Or else for mischief's sake. I scarce believe
My purpose put before you fair and plain
Would need annoy so much; but there 's my luck—
From first to last I blunder. Still, one more
Turn at the target, try to speak my thought !
Since he could guess my purpose, won't you read
Right what he set down wrong? He said—let 's
think !
Ay, so !—he did begin by telling heaps
Of tales about you. Now, you see—suppose
Anyone told me—my own mother died
Before I knew her—told me—to his cost !—
Such tales about my own dead mother : why,
You would not wonder surely if I knew,
By nothing but my own heart's help, he lied,
Would you? No reason 's wanted in the case.
So with you ! In they burnt on me, his tales,
Much as when madhouse-inmates crowd around,
Make captive any visitor and scream
All sorts of stories of their keeper—he 's
Both dwarf and giant, vulture, wolf, dog, cat,
Serpent and scorpion, yet man all the same ;
Sane people soon see through the gibberish !
I just made out, you somehow lived somewhere
A life of shame—I can't distinguish more—

Married or single—how, don't matter much :
Shame which himself had caused—that point was
clear,
That fact confessed—that thing to hold and keep.
Oh, and he added some absurdity
—That you were here to make me—ha, ha, ha!—
Still love you, still of mind to die for you,
Ha, ha—as if that needed mighty pains!
Now, foolish as . . . but never mind myself
—What I am, what I am not, in the eye
Of the world, is what I never cared for much.
Fool then or no fool, not one single word
In the whole string of lies did I believe,
But this—this only—if I choke, who cares?—
I believe somehow in your purity
Perfect as ever! Else what use is God?
He is God, and work miracles He can!
Then, what shall I do? Quite as clear, my course!
They 've got a thing they call their Labyrinth
I' the garden yonder: and my cousin played
A pretty trick once, led and lost me deep
Inside the briery maze of hedge round hedge;
And there might I be staying now, stock-still,
But that I laughing bade eyes follow nose
And so straight pushed my path through let and
stop
And soon was out in the open, face all scratched,
But well behind my back the prison-bars
In sorry plight enough, I promise you!
So here: I won my way to truth through lies—
Said, as I saw light,—if her shame be shame
I 'll rescue and redeem her,—shame 's no shame?
Then, I 'll avenge, protect—redeem myself
The stupidest of sinners! Here I stand!
Dear,—let me once dare call you so,—you said
Thus ought you to have done, four years ago,

Such things and such! Ay, dear, and what
ought I?
You were revealed to me: where 's gratitude,
Where 's memory even, where the gain of you
Discernible in my low after-life
Of fancied consolation? why, no horse
Once fed on corn, will, missing corn, go munch
Mere thistles like a donkey! I missed you,
And in your place found—him, made him my love,
Ay, did I,—by this token, that he taught
So much beast-nature that I meant . . . God
knows
Whether I bow me to the dust enough! . . .
To marry—yes, my cousin here! I hope
That was a master-stroke! Take heart of hers,
And give her hand of mine with no more heart
Than now you see upon this brow I strike!
What atom of a heart do I retain
Not all yours? Dear, you know it! Easily
May she accord me pardon when I place
My brow beneath her foot, if foot so deign,
Since uttermost indignity is spared—
Mere marriage and no love! And all this time
Not one word to the purpose! Are you free?
Only wait! only let me serve—deserve
Where you appoint and how you see the good!
I have the will—perhaps the power—at least
Means that have power against the world. For
time—
Take my whole life for your experiment!
If you are bound—in marriage, say—why, still,
Still, sure, there 's something for a friend to do,
Outside? A mere well-wisher, understand!
I 'll sit, my life long, at your gate, you know,
Swing it wide open to let you and him
Pass freely,—and you need not look, much less

Fling me a '*Thank you—are you there, old friend?*'
Don't say that even: I should drop like shot!
So I feel now at least: some day, who knows?
After no end of weeks and months and years
You might smile '*I believe you did your best!*'
And that shall make my heart leap—leap such leap
As lands the feet in Heaven to wait you there!
Ah, there 's just one thing more! How pale you look!
Why? Are you angry? If there 's, after all,
Worst come to worst—if still there somehow be
The shame—I said was no shame,—none, I swear!—
In that case, if my hand and what it holds,—
My name,—might be your safeguard now—at once—
Why, here 's the hand—you have the heart! Of course—
No cheat, no binding you, because I 'm bound,
To let me off probation by one day,
Week, month, year, lifetime! Prove as you propose!
Here 's the hand with the name to take or leave!
That 's all—and no great piece of news, I hope!"

"Give me the hand, then!" she cries hastily.
"Quick, now! I hear his footstep!"

Hand in hand
The couple face him as he enters, stops
Short, stands surprised a moment, laughs away
Surprise, resumes the much-experienced man.

"So, you accept him?"

"Till us death do part!"

"No longer? Come, that 's right and rational!
I fancied there was power in common sense,
But did not know it worked thus promptly. Well—
At last each understands the other, then?
Each drops disguise, then? So, at supper-time
These masquerading people doff their gear,
Grand Turk his pompous turban, Quakeress
Her stiff-starched bib and tucker,—make-believe
That only bothers when, ball-business done,
Nature demands champagne and *mayonnaise*.
Just so has each of us sage three abjured
His and her moral pet particular
Pretension to superiority,
And, cheek by jowl, we henceforth munch and joke!
Go, happy pair, paternally dismissed
To live and die together—for a month,
Discretion can award no more! Depart
From whatsoe'er the calm sweet solitude
Selected—Paris not improbably—
At month's end, when the honeycomb 's left wax,
—You, daughter, with a pocketful of gold
Enough to find your village boys and girls
In duffel cloaks and hobnailed shoes from May
To—what 's the phrase?—Christmas-come-never-mas!
You, son and heir of mine, shall re-appear
Ere Spring-time, that 's the ring-time, lose one leaf,
And—not without regretful smack of lip
The while you wipe it free of honey-smear—
Marry the cousin, play the magistrate,
Stand for the county, prove perfection's pink—
Master of hounds, gay-coated dine—nor die
Sooner than needs of gout, obesity,
And sons at Christ Church! As for me,—ah me,

I abdicate—retire on my success,
Four years well occupied in teaching youth
—My son and daughter the exemplary !
Time for me to retire now, having placed
Proud on their pedestal the pair : in turn,
Let them do homage to their master ! You,—
Well, your flushed cheek and flashing eye proclaim
Sufficiently your gratitude : you paid
The *honorarium*, the ten thousand pounds
To purpose, did you not? I told you so !
And you, but, bless me, why so pale—so faint
At influx of good fortune? Certainly,
No matter how or why or whose the fault,
I save your life—save it, nor less nor more !
You blindly were resolved to welcome death
In that black boor-and-bumpkin-haunted hole
Of his, the prig with all the preachments ! *You*
Installed as nurse and matron to the crones
And wenches, while there lay a world outside
Like Paris (which again I recommend)
In company and guidance of—first, this,
Then—all in good time—some new friend as fit—
What if I were to say, some fresh myself,
As I once figured? Each dog has his day,
And mine 's at sunset : what should old dog do
But eye young litters' frisky puppyhood?
Oh I shall watch this beauty and this youth
Frisk it in brilliance ! But don't fear ! Discreet,
I shall pretend to no more recognize
My quondam pupils than the doctor nods
When certain old acquaintances may cross
His path in Park, or sit down prim beside
His plate at dinner-table : tip nor wink
Scares patients he has put, for reason good,
Under restriction,—maybe, talked sometimes
Of douche or horsewhip to,—for why? because

The gentleman would crazily declare
His best friend was—Iago! Ay, and worse—
The lady, all at once grown lunatic,
In suicidal monomania vowed,
To save her soul, she needs must starve herself!
They 're cured now, both, and I tell nobody.
Why don't you speak? Nay, speechless, each of you
Can spare,—without unclasping plighted troth,—
At least one hand to shake! Left-hands will do—
Yours first, my daughter! Ah, it guards—it gripes
The precious Album fast—and prudently!
As well obliterate the record there
On page the last: allow me tear the leaf!
Pray, now! And afterward, to make amends,
What if all three of us contribute each
A line to that prelusive fragment,—help
The embarrassed bard who broke out to break down
Dumbfoundered at such unforeseen success?
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot*'
You begin—*place aux dames!* I'll prompt you then!
'*Here do I take the good the gods allot!*'
Next you, Sir! What, still sulky? Sing, O Muse!
'*Here does my lord in full discharge his shot!*'
Now for the crowning flourish! mine shall be . . ."

"Nothing to match your first effusion, mar
What was, is, shall remain your masterpiece!
Authorship has the alteration-itch!
No, I protest against erasure. Read,
My friend!" (she gasps out). "Read and quickly
read
'*Before us death do part*,' what made you mine
And made me yours—the marriage-licence here!
Decide if he is like to mend the same!"

And so the lady, white to ghastliness,
Manages somehow to display the page

With left-hand only, while the right retains
The other hand, the young man's,—dreaming-drunk
He, with this drench of stupefying stuff,
Eyes wide, mouth open,—half the idiot's stare
And half the prophet's insight,—holding tight,
All the same, by his one fact in the world—
The lady's right-hand: he but seems to read—
Does not, for certain; yet, how understand
Unless he reads?

So, understand he does,
For certain. Slowly, word by word, *she* reads
Aloud that licence—or that warrant, say.

"'One against two—and two that urge their odds
To uttermost—I needs must try resource!
Madam, I laid me prostrate, bade you spurn
Body and soul: you spurned and safely spurned
So you had spared me the superfluous taunt
"Prostration means no power to stand erect,
Stand, trampling on who trampled—prostrate now!"
So, with my other fool-foe: I was fain
Let the boy touch me with the buttoned foil,
And him the infection gains, he too must needs
Catch up the butcher's cleaver. Be it so!
Since play turns earnest, here's my serious fence.
He loves you; he demands your love: both know
What love means in my language. Love him then!
Pursuant to a pact, love pays my debt:
Therefore, deliver me from him, thereby
Likewise delivering from me yourself!
For, hesitate—much more, refuse consent—
I tell the whole truth to your husband. Flat
Cards lie on table, in our gamester-phrase!
Consent—you stop my mouth, the only way.'

"I did well, trusting instinct: knew your hand
Had never joined with his in fellowship
Over this pact of infamy. You known—
As he was known through every nerve of me.
Therefore I '*stopped his mouth the only way*'
But *my* way! none was left for you, my friend—
The loyal—near, the loved one! No—no—no!
Threaten? Chastise? The coward would but quail.
Conquer who can, the cunning of the snake!
Stamp out his slimy strength from tail to head,
And still you leave vibration of the tongue.
His malice had redoubled—not on me
Who, myself, choose my own refining fire—
But on poor unsuspicious innocence;
And,—victim,—to turn executioner
Also—that feat effected, forky tongue
Had done indeed its office! Once snake's '*mouth*'
Thus '*open*'—how could mortal '*stop it*'.?'"

"So!"

A tiger-flash—yell, spring, and scream: halloo!
Death 's out and on him, has and holds him—ugh!
But *ne trucidet coram populo*
Juvenis senem! Right the Horatian rule!

There, see how soon a quiet comes to pass!

VIII

The youth is somehow by the lady's side.
His right-hand grasps her right-hand once again.
Both gaze on the dead body. Hers the word.

"And that was good but useless. Had I lived
The danger was to dread: but, dying now—

Himself would hardly become talkative,
Since talk no more means torture. Fools—what fools
These wicked men are! Had I borne four years,
Four years of weeks and months and days and nights,
Inured me to the consciousness of life
Coiled round by his life, with the tongue to ply,—
But that I bore about me, for prompt use
At urgent need, the thing that '*stops the mouth*'
And stays the venom? Since such need was now
Or never,—how should use not follow need?
Bear witness for me, I withdraw from life
By virtue of the licence—warrant, say,
That blackens yet this Album—white again,
Thanks still to my one friend who tears the page!
Now, let me write the line of supplement,
As counselled by my foe there: '*each a line!*'"

And she does falteringly write to end.

"*I die now through the villain who lies dead,*
Righteously slain. He would have outraged me,
So, my defender slew him. God protect
The right! Where wrong lay, I bear witness now.
Let man believe me, whose last breath is spent
In blessing my defender from my soul!"

And so ends the Inn Album.

As she dies,
Begins outside a voice that sounds like song,
And is indeed half song though meant for speech
Muttered in time to motion—stir of heart
That unsubduably must bubble forth
To match the fawn-step as it mounts the stair.

"All 's ended and all 's over! Verdict found
'*Not guilty*'—prisoner forthwith set free,
Mid cheers the Court pretends to disregard!
Now Portia, now for Daniel, late severe,
At last appeased, benignant! '*This young man—*
Hem—has the young man's foibles but no fault.
He 's virgin soil—a friend must cultivate.
I think no plant called 'love' grows wild—a friend
May introduce, and name the bloom, the fruit!'
Here somebody dares wave a handkerchief—
She 'll want to hide her face with presently!
Good-bye then! '*Cigno fedel, cigno fedel,*
Addio!' Now, was ever such mistake—
Ever such foolish ugly omen? Pshaw!
Wagner, beside! '*Amo te solo, te*
Solo amai!' That 's worth fifty such!
But, mum, the grave face at the opened door!"

And so the good gay girl, with eyes and cheeks
Diamond and damask,—cheeks so white erewhile
Because of a vague fancy, idle fear
Chased on reflection!—pausing, taps discreet;
And then, to give herself a countenance,
Before she comes upon the pair inside,
Loud—the oft-quoted, long-laughed-over line—
"'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
Open the door!"

No: let the curtain fall!

THE

AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS

May I be permitted to chat a little, by way of recreation, at the end of a somewhat toilsome and perhaps fruitless adventure?

If, because of the immense fame of the following Tragedy, I wished to acquaint myself with it, and could only do so by the help of a translator, I should require him to be literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our language. The use of certain allowable constructions which, happening to be out of daily favour, are all the more appropriate to archaic workmanship, is no violence: but I would be tolerant for once,—in the case of so immensely famous an original,—of even a clumsy attempt to furnish me with the very turn of each phrase in as Greek a fashion as English will bear: while, with respect to amplifications and embellishments,—anything rather than, with the good farmer, experience that most signal of mortifications, "to gape for Æschylus and get Theognis." I should especially decline,—what may appear to brighten up a passage,—the employment of a new word for some old one—*πόνος*, or *μέγας*, or *τέλος*, with its congeners, recurring four times in three lines: for though such substitution may be in itself perfectly justifiable, yet this exercise of ingenuity ought to be within the competence of the unaided English reader if he likes to show himself ingenious. Learning Greek teaches Greek, and nothing else: certainly not common sense, if that have failed to precede the teaching. Further,—

if I obtained a mere strict bald version of thing by thing, or at least word pregnant with thing, I should hardly look for an impossible transmission of the reputed magniloquence and sonority of the Greek; and this with the less regret, inasmuch as there is abundant musicality elsewhere, but nowhere else than in his poem the ideas of the poet. And lastly, when presented with these ideas, I should expect the result to prove very hard reading indeed if it were meant to resemble Æschylus, *ξυμβαλεῖν οὐ ῥᾴδιος*, "not easy to understand," in the opinion of his stoutest advocate among the ancients; while, I suppose, even modern scholarship sympathizes with that early declaration of the redoubtable Salmasius, when, looking about for an example of the truly obscure for the benefit of those who found obscurity in the sacred books, he protested that this particular play leaves them all behind in this respect, with their "Hebraisms, Syriasms, Hellenisms, and the whole of such bag and baggage."[1] For, over and above the purposed ambiguity of the Chorus, the text is sadly corrupt, probably interpolated, and certainly mutilated; and no unlearned person enjoys the scholar's privilege of trying his fancy upon each obstacle whenever he comes to a stoppage, and effectually clearing the way by suppressing what seems to lie in it.

All I can say for the present performance is, that I have done as I would be done by, if need were. Should anybody, without need, honour my translation by a comparison with the original,

[1] "Quis Æschylum possit affirmare Græce nunc scienti magis patere explicabilem quam Evangelia aut Epistolas Apostolicas? Unus ejus Agamemnon obscuritate superat quantum est librorum sacrorum cum suis Hebraismis et Syriasmis et tota Hellenistica supellectili vel farragine."

SALMASIUS *de Hellenistica*, Epist. Dedic

I beg him to observe that, following no editor exclusively, I keep to the earlier readings so long as sense can be made out of them, but disregard, I hope, little of importance in recent criticism so far as I have fallen in with it. Fortunately, the poorest translation, provided only it be faithful, —though it reproduce all the artistic confusion of tenses, moods, and persons, with which the original teems,—will not only suffice to display what an eloquent friend maintains to be the all-in-all of poetry—"the action of the piece"—but may help to illustrate his assurance that "the Greeks are the highest models of expression, the unapproached masters of the grand style: their expression is so excellent because it is so admirably kept in its right degree of prominence, because it is so simple and so well subordinated, because it draws its force directly from the pregnancy of the matter which it conveys . . . not a word wasted, not a sentiment capriciously thrown in, stroke on stroke!"[1] So may all happen!

Just a word more on the subject of my spelling—in a transcript from the Greek and there exclusively—Greek names and places precisely as does the Greek author. I began this practice, with great innocency of intention, some six-and-thirty years ago. Leigh Hunt, I remember, was accustomed to speak of his gratitude, when ignorant of Greek, to those writers (like Goldsmith) who had obliged him by using English characters, so that he might relish, for instance, the smooth quality of such a phrase as "hapa lunetai galené;" he said also that Shelley was indignant at "Firenze" having displaced the

[1] *Poems by Matthew Arnold*, Preface.

Dantesque "Fiorenza," and would contemptuously English the intruder "Firence." I supposed I was doing a simple thing enough: but there has been till lately much astonishment at *os* and *us*, *ai* and *oi*, representing the same letters in Greek. Of a sudden, however, whether in translation or out of it, everybody seems committing the offence, although the adoption of *u* for *v* still presents such difficulty that it is a wonder how we have hitherto escaped "Eyripides." But there existed a sturdy Briton who, Ben Jonson informs us, wrote "The Life of the Emperor Anthony Pie"—whom we now acquiesce in as Antoninus Pius: for "with time and patience the mulberry leaf becomes satin." Yet there is, on all sides, much profession of respect for what Keats called "vowelled Greek"—"consonanted," one would expect; and, in a criticism upon a late admirable translation of something of my own, it was deplored that, in a certain verse corresponding in measure to the fourteenth of the sixth Pythian Ode, "neither Professor Jebb in his Greek, nor Mr. Browning in his English, could emulate that matchlessly musical *γόνον ἰδὼν κάλλιστον ἀνδρῶν.*" Now, undoubtedly, "Seeing her son the fairest of men" has more sense than sound to boast of: but then, would not an Italian roll us out "Rimirando il figliuolo bellissimo degli uomini!" whereat Pindar, no less than Professor Jebb and Mr. Browning, *τριακτῆρος οἴχεται τυχών.*

It is recorded in the annals of Art[1] that there was once upon a time, practising so far north as Stockholm, a painter and picture-cleaner—sire of a less unhappy son—Old Muytens: and the annalist,

[1] *Lettres à un jeune Prince*, traduites du Suédois.

Baron de Tessé, has not concealed his profound dissatisfaction at Old Muytens' conceit "to have himself had something to do with the work of whatever master of eminence might pass through his hands." Whence it was,—the Baron goes on to deplore,—that much detriment was done to that excellent piece "The Recognition of Achilles," by Rubens, through the perversity of Old Muytens, "who must needs take on him to beautify every nymph of the twenty by the bestowment of a widened eye and an enlarged mouth." I, at least, have left eyes and mouths everywhere as I found them, and this conservatism is all that claims praise for—what is, after all, *ἀκέλευστος ἄμισθος ἀοιδά*. No, neither "uncommanded" nor "unrewarded:" since it was commanded of me by my venerated friend Thomas Carlyle, and rewarded will it indeed become if I am permitted to dignify it by the prefatory insertion of his dear and noble name.

R. B.

LONDON: *October 1st*, 1877.

PERSONS

Warder
Choros of Old Men
KLUTAIMNESTRA
TALTHUBIOS, *Herald*
AGAMEMNON
KASSANDRA
AIGISTHOS

THE AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS

1877

WARDER

THE gods I ask deliverance from these labours,
Watch of a year's length whereby, slumbering through it
On the Atreidai's roofs on elbow,—dog-like—
I know of nightly star-groups the assemblage,
And those that bring to men winter and summer
Bright dynasts, as they pride them in the æther
—Stars, when they wither, and the uprisings of them.
And now on ward I wait the torch's token,
The glow of fire, shall bring from Troia message
And word of capture: so prevails audacious
The man's-way-planning hoping heart of woman.
But when I, driven from night-rest, dew-drenched hold to
This couch of mine—not looked upon by visions,
Since fear instead of sleep still stands beside me,
So as that fast I fix in sleep no eyelids—
And when to sing or chirp a tune I fancy,
For slumber such song-remedy infusing,
I wail then, for this House's fortune groaning,
Not, as of old, after the best ways governed.
Now, lucky be deliverance from these labours,
At good news—the appearing dusky fire!
O hail, thou lamp of night, a day-long lightness

Revealing, and of dances the ordainment!
Halloo, halloo!
To Agamemnon's wife I show, by shouting,
That, from bed starting up at once, i' the household
Joyous acclaim, good-omened to this torch-blaze,
She send aloft, if haply Ilion's city
Be taken, as the beacon boasts announcing.
Ay, and, for me, myself will dance a prelude,
For, that my masters' dice drop right, I 'll reckon:
Since thrice-six has it thrown to me, this signal.
Well, may it hap that, as he comes, the loved hand
O'the household's lord I may sustain with this hand!
As for the rest, I 'm mute: on tongue a big ox
Has trodden. Yet this House, if voice it take should,
Most plain would speak. So, willing I myself speak
To those who know: to who know not—I 'm blankness.

CHOROS

The tenth year this, since Priamos' great match,
King Menelaos, Agamemnon King,
—The strenuous yoke-pair of the Atreidai's honour
Two-throned, two-sceptred, whereof Zeus was donor—
Did from this land the aid, the armament despatch,
The thousand-sailored force of Argives clamouring
"Ares" from out the indignant breast, as fling
Passion forth vultures which, because of grief
Away,—as are their young ones,—with the thief,
Lofty above their brood-nests wheel in ring,
Row round and round with oar of either wing,
Lament the bedded chicks, lost labour that was love:
Which hearing, one above
—Whether Apollon, Pan or Zeus—that wail,

Sharp-piercing bird-shriek of the guests who fare
Housemates with gods in air—
Suchanone sends, against who these assail,
What, late-sent, shall not fail
Of punishing—Erinus. Here as there,
The Guardian of the Guest, Zeus, the excelling one,
Sends against Alexandros either son
Of Atreus: for that wife, the many-husbanded,
Appointing many a tug that tries the limb,
While the knee plays the prop in dust, while, shred
To morsels, lies the spear-shaft; in those grim
Marriage-prolusions when their Fury wed
Danaoi and Troes, both alike. All 's said:
Things are where things are, and, as fate has willed,
So shall they be fulfilled.
Not gently-grieving, not just doling out
The drops of expiation—no, nor tears distilled—
Shall he we know of bring the hard about
To soft—that intense ire
At those mock rites unsanctified by fire.
But we pay nought here: through our flesh, age-weighed,
Left out from who gave aid
In that day,—we remain,
Staying on staves a strength
The equal of a child's at length.
For when young marrow in the breast doth reign,
That 's the old man's match,—Ares out of place
In either: but in oldest age's case,
Foliage a-fading, why, he wends his way
On three feet, and, no stronger than a child,
Wanders about gone wild,
A dream in day.

But thou, Tundareus' daughter, Klutaimnestra queen,

What need? What new? What having heard
or seen,
By what announcement's tidings, everywhere
Settest thou, round about, the sacrifice a-flare?
For, of all gods the city-swaying,
Those supernal, those infernal,
Those of the fields', those of the mart's obeying,—
The altars blaze with gifts;
And here and there, heaven-high the torch uplifts
Flame—medicated with persuasions mild,
With foul admixture unbeguiled—
Of holy unguent, from the clotted chrism
Brought from the palace, safe in its abysm.
Of these things, speaking what may be indeed
Both possible and lawful to concede,
Healer do thou become!—of this solicitude
Which, now, stands plainly forth of evil mood,
And, then . . . but from oblations, hope, to-day
Gracious appearing, wards away
From soul the insatiate care,
The sorrow at my breast, devouring there!

Empowered am I to sing
The omens, what their force which, journeying,
Rejoiced the potentates:
(For still, from God, inflates
My breast song-suasion: age,
Born to the business, still such war can wage)
—How the fierce bird against the Teukris land
Despatched, with spear and executing hand,
The Achaian's two-throned empery—o'er Hellas'
youth
Two rulers with one mind:
The birds' king to these kings of ships, on high,
—The black sort, and the sort that 's white
behind,—

Appearing by the palace, on the spear-throw side,
In right sky-regions, visible far and wide,—
Devouring a hare-creature, great with young,
Baulked of more racings they, as she from whom
they sprung!
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail!
But may the good prevail!

The prudent army-prophet seeing two
The Atreidai, two their tempers, knew
Those feasting on the hare
The armament-conductors were;
And thus he spoke, explaining signs in view.
"In time, this outset takes the town of Priamos:
But all before its towers,—the people's wealth that
was,
Of flocks and herds,—as sure, shall booty-sharing
thence
Drain to the dregs away, by battle violence.
Only, have care lest grudge of any god disturb
With cloud the unsullied shine of that great force,
the curb
Of Troia, struck with damp
Beforehand in the camp!
For envyingly is
The virgin Artemis
Toward—her father's flying hounds—this House—
The sacrificers of the piteous
And cowering beast,
Brood and all, ere the birth: she hates the eagles'
feast.
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail!
But may the good prevail!

"Thus ready is the beauteous one with help
To those small dewdrop-things fierce lions whelp,

And udder-loving litter of each brute
That roams the mead; and therefore makes she suit,
The fair one, for fulfilment to the end
Of things these signs portend—
Which partly smile, indeed, but partly scowl—
The phantasms of the fowl.
I call Ieïos Paian to avert
She work the Danaoi hurt
By any thwarting waftures, long and fast
Holdings from sail of ships:
And sacrifice, another than the last,
She for herself precipitate—
Something unlawful, feast for no man's lips,
Builder of quarrels, with the House cognate—
Having in awe no husband: for remains
A frightful, backward-darting in the path,
Wily house-keeping chronicler of wrath,
That has to punish that old children's fate!"
Such things did Kalchas,—with abundant gains
As well,—vociferate,
Predictions from the birds, in journeying,
Above the abode of either king.
With these, symphonious, sing—
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail!
But may the good prevail!

Zeus, whosoe'er he be,—if that express
Aught dear to him on whom I call—
So do I him address.
I cannot liken out, by all
Admeasurement of powers,
Any but Zeus for refuge at such hours,
If veritably needs I must
From off my soul its vague care-burthen thrust.

Not—whosoever was the great of yore,
Bursting to bloom with bravery all round—

Is in our mouths: he was, but is no more.
And who it was that after came to be,
Met the thrice-throwing wrestler,—he
Is also gone to ground.
But "Zeus"—if any, heart and soul, that name—
Shouting the triumph-praise—proclaim,
Complete in judgment shall that man be found.
Zeus, who leads onward mortals to be wise,
Appoints that suffering masterfully teach.
In sleep, before the heart of each,
A woe-remembering travail sheds in dew
Discretion,—ay, and melts the unwilling too
By what, perchance, may be a graciousness
Of gods, enforced no less,—
As they, commanders of the crew,
Assume the awful seat.

And then the old leader of the Achaian fleet,
Disparaging no seer—
With bated breath to suit misfortune's inrush here
—(What time it laboured, that Achaian host,
By stay from sailing,—every pulse at length
Emptied of vital strength,—
Hard over Kalchis shore-bound, current-crost
In Aulis station,—while the winds which post
From Strumon, ill-delayers, famine-fraught,
Tempters of man to sail where harbourage is naught,
Spendthrifts of ships and cables, turning time
To twice the length,—these carded, by delay,
To less and less away
The Argeians' flowery prime:
And when a remedy more grave and grand
Than aught before,—yea, for the storm and dearth,—
The prophet to the foremost in command
Shrieked forth, as cause of this

Adducing Artemis,
So that the Atreidai striking staves on earth
Could not withhold the tear)—
Then did the king, the elder, speak this clear.

"Heavy the fate, indeed,—to disobey!
Yet heavy if my child I slay,
The adornment of my household: with the tide
Of virgin-slaughter, at the altar-side,
A father's hands defiling: which the way
Without its evils, say?
How shall I turn fleet-fugitive,
Failing of duty to allies?
Since for a wind-abating sacrifice
And virgin blood,—'t is right they strive,
Nay, madden with desire.
Well may it work them—this that they require!"

But when he underwent necessity's
Yoke-trace,—from soul blowing unhallowed change
Unclean, abominable,—thence—another man—
The audacious mind of him began
Its wildest range.
For this it is gives mortals hardihood—
Some vice-devising miserable mood
Of madness, and first woe of all the brood.
The sacrificer of his daughter—strange!—
He dared become, to expedite
Woman-avenging warfare,—anchors weighed
With such prelusive rite!

Prayings and callings "Father"—naught they made
Of these, and of the virgin-age,—
Captains heart-set on war to wage!

His ministrants, vows done, the father bade—
Kid-like, above the altar, swathed in pall,
Take her—lift high, and have no fear at all,
Head-downward, and the fair mouth's guard
And frontage hold,—press hard
From utterance a curse against the House
By dint of bit—violence bridling speech.
And as to ground her saffron-vest she shed,
She smote the sacrificers all and each
With arrow sweet and piteous,
From the eye only sped,—
Significant of will to use a word,
Just as in pictures: since, full many a time,
In her sire's guest-hall, by the well-heaped board
Had she made music,—lovingly with chime
Of her chaste voice, that unpolluted thing,
Honoured the third libation,—paian that should bring
Good fortune to the sire she loved so well.

What followed—those things I nor saw nor tell.
But Kalchas' arts,—whate'er they indicate,—
Miss of fulfilment never: it is fate.
True, justice makes, in sufferers, a desire
To know the future woe preponderate.
But—hear before is need?
To that, farewell and welcome! 't is the same, indeed,
As grief beforehand: clearly, part for part,
Conformably to Kalchas' art,
Shall come the event.
But be they as they may, things subsequent,—
What is to do, prosperity betide
E'en as we wish it!—we, the next allied,
Sole guarding barrier of the Apian land.

I am come, reverencing power in thee,
O Klutaimnestra! For 't is just we bow
To the ruler's wife,—the male-seat man-bereaved.
But if thou, having heard good news,—or none,—
For good news' hope dost sacrifice thus wide,
I would hear gladly: art thou mute,—no grudge!

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Good-news-announcer, may—as is the by-word—
Morn become, truly,—news from Night his mother!
But thou shalt learn joy past all hope of hearing.
Priamos' city have the Argeioi taken.

CHOROS

How sayest? The word, from want of faith, escaped me.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Troia the Achaioi hold: do I speak plainly?

CHOROS

Joy overcreeps me, calling forth the tear-drop.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Right! for, that glad thou art, thine eye convicts thee.

CHOROS

For—what to thee, of all this, trusty token?

KLUTAIMNESTRA

What 's here! how else? unless the god have cheated.

CHOROS

Haply thou flattering shows of dreams respectest?

KLUTAIMNESTRA

No fancy would I take of soul sleep-burthened.

CHOROS

But has there puffed thee up some unwinged omen?

KLUTAIMNESTRA

As a young maid's my mind thou mockest grossly.

CHOROS

Well, at what time was—even sacked, the city?

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Of this same mother Night—the dawn, I tell thee.

CHOROS

And who of messengers could reach this swiftness?

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Hephaistos—sending a bright blaze from Idé.
Beacon did beacon send, from fire the poster,
Hitherward: Idé to the rock Hermaian
Of Lemnos: and a third great torch o' the island
Zeus' seat received in turn, the Athoan summit.
And,—so upsoaring as to stride sea over,
The strong lamp-voyager, and all for joyance—
Did the gold-glorious splendour, any sun like,
Pass on—the pine-tree—to Makistos' watch-place;
Who did not,—tardy,—caught, no wits about him,
By sleep,—decline his portion of the missive.
And far the beacon's light, on stream Euripos
Arriving, made aware Messapios' warders,
And up they lit in turn, played herald onwards,
Kindling with flame a heap of grey old heather.
And, strengthening still, the lamp, decaying nowise,

Springing o'er Plain Asopos,—full-moon-fashion
Effulgent,—toward the crag of Mount Kithairon,
Roused a new rendering-up of fire the escort—
And light, far escort, lacked no recognition
O' the guard—as burning more than burnings told you.
And over Lake Gorgopis light went leaping,
And, at Mount Aigiplanktos safe arriving,
Enforced the law—"to never stint the fire-stuff."
And they send, lighting up with ungrudged vigour,
Of flame a huge beard, ay, the very foreland
So as to strike above, in burning onward,
The look-out which commands the Strait Saronic.
Then did it dart until it reached the outpost
Mount Arachnaios here, the city's neighbour;
And then darts to this roof of the Atreidai
This light of Idé's fire not unforefathered!
Such are the rules prescribed the flambeau-bearers:
He beats that 's first and also last in running.
Such is the proof and token I declare thee,
My husband having sent me news from Troia.

CHOROS

The gods, indeed, anon will I pray, woman!
But now, these words to hear, and sate my wonder
Thoroughly, I am fain—if twice thou tell them.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Troia do the Achaioi hold, this same day.
I think a noise—no mixture—reigns i' the city.
Sour wine and unguent pour thou in one vessel—
Standers-apart, not lovers, wouldst thou style them:
And so, of captives and of conquerors, partwise
The voices are to hear, of fortune diverse.
For those, indeed, upon the bodies prostrate

Of husbands, brothers, children upon parents
—The old men, from a throat that 's free no longer,
Shriekingly wail the death-doom of their dearest :
While these—the after-battle hungry labour,
Which prompts night-faring, marshals them to breakfast
On the town's store, according to no billet
Of sharing, but as each drew lot of fortune.
In the spear-captured Troic habitations
House they already : from the frosts upæthral
And dews delivered, will they, luckless creatures,
Without a watch to keep, slumber all night through.
And if they fear the gods, the city-guarders,
And the gods' structures of the conquered country,
They may not—capturers—soon in turn be captive.
But see no prior lust befall the army
To sack things sacred—by gain-cravings vanquished !
For there needs homeward the return's salvation,
To round the new limb back o' the double racecourse.
And guilty to the gods if came the army,
Awakened up the sorrow of those slaughtered
Might be—should no outbursting evils happen.
But may good beat—no turn to see i' the balance !
For, many benefits I want the gain of.

CHOROS

Woman, like prudent man thou kindly speakest.
And I, thus having heard thy trusty tokens,
The gods to rightly hail forthwith prepare me ;
For, grace that must be paid has crowned our labours.

O Zeus the king, and friendly Night

Of these brave boons bestower—
Thou who didst fling on Troia's every tower
The o'er-roofing snare, that neither great thing might,
Nor any of the young ones, overpass
Captivity's great sweep-net—one and all
Of Até held in thrall!
Ay, Zeus I fear—the guest's friend great—who was
The doer of this, and long since bent
The bow on Alexandros with intent
That neither wide o' the white
Nor o'er the stars the foolish dart should light.
The stroke of Zeus—they have it, as men say!
This, at least, from the source track forth we may!
As he ordained, so has he done.
"No"—said someone—
"The gods think fit to care
Nowise for mortals, such
As those by whom the good and fair
Of things denied their touch
Is trampled!" but he was profane.
That they do care, has been made plain
To offspring of the over-bold,
Outbreathing "Ares" greater than is just—
Houses that spill with more than they can hold,
More than is best for man. Be man's what must
Keep harm off, so that in himself he find
Sufficiency—the well-endowed of mind!
For there 's no bulwark in man's wealth to him
Who, through a surfeit, kicks—into the dim
And disappearing—Right's great altar.

Yes—
It urges him, the sad persuasiveness,
Até's insufferable child that schemes
Treason beforehand: and all cure is vain.

It is not hidden : out it glares again,
A light dread-lamping-mischief, just as gleams
The badness of the bronze ;
Through rubbing, puttings to the touch,
Black-clotted is he, judged at once.
He seeks—the boy—a flying bird to clutch,
The insufferable brand
Setting upon the city of his land
Whereof not any god hears prayer ;
While him who brought about such evils there,
That unjust man, the god in grapple throws.
Such an one, Paris goes
Within the Atreidai's house—
Shamed the guest's board by robbery of the spouse.

And, leaving to her townsmen throngs a-spread
With shields, and spear-thrusts of sea-armament,
And bringing Ilion, in a dowry's stead,
Destruction—swiftly through the gates she went,
Daring the undareable. But many a groan outbroke
From prophets of the House as thus they spoke.
"Woe, woe the House, the House and Rulers,—woe
The marriage-bed and dints
A husband's love imprints !
There she stands silent ! meets no honour—no
Shame—sweetest still to see of things gone long ago !
And, through desire of one across the main,
A ghost will seem within the house to reign :
And hateful to the husband is the grace
Of well-shaped statues : from—in place of eyes
Those blanks—all Aphrodite dies.

" But dream-appearing mournful fantasies—
There they stand, bringing grace that 's vain.
For vain 't is, when brave things one seems to view ;
The fantasy has floated off, hands through ;
Gone, that appearance,—nowise left to creep,—

On wings, the servants in the paths of sleep!"
Woes, then, in household and on hearth, are such
As these—and woes surpassing these by much.
But not these only: everywhere—
For those who from the land
Of Hellas issued in a band,
Sorrow, the heart must bear,
Sits in the home of each, conspicuous there.
Many a circumstance, at least,
Touches the very breast.
For those
Whom any sent away,—he knows:
And in the live man's stead,
Armour and ashes reach
The house of each.

For Ares, gold-exchanger for the dead,
And balance-holder in the fight o' the spear,
Due-weight from Ilion sends—
What moves the tear on tear—
A charred scrap to the friends:
Filling with well-packed ashes every urn,
For man—that was—the sole return.
And they groan—praising much, the while,
Now this man as experienced in the strife,
Now that, fallen nobly on a slaughtered pile,
Because of—not his own—another's wife.
But things there be, one barks,
When no man harks:
A surreptitious grief that 's grudge
Against the Atreidai who first sought the judge.
But some there, round the rampart, have
In Ilian earth, each one his grave:
All fair-formed as at birth,
It hid them—what they have and hold—the hostile earth.

And big with anger goes the city's word,
And pays a debt by public curse incurred.
And ever with me—as about to hear
A something night-involved—remains my fear :
Since of the many-slayers—not
Unwatching are the gods.
The black Erinues, at due periods—
Whoever gains the lot
Of fortune with no right—
Him, by life's strain and stress
Back-again-beaten from success,
They strike blind : and among the out-of-sight
For who has got to be, avails no might.
The being praised outrageously
Is grave, for at the eyes of such an one
Is launched, from Zeus, the thunder-stone.
Therefore do I decide
For so much and no more prosperity
Than of his envy passes unespied.
Neither a city-sacker would I be,
Nor life, myself by others captive, see.

A swift report has gone our city through,
From fire, the good-news messenger : if true,
Who knows? Or is it not a god-sent lie?
Who is so childish and deprived of sense
That, having, at announcements of the flame
Thus novel, felt his own heart fired thereby,
He then shall at a change of evidence,
Be worsted just the same?
It is conspicuous in a woman's nature,
Before its view to take a grace for granted :
Too trustful,—on her boundary, usurpature
Is swiftly made ;
But swiftly, too, decayed,
The glory perishes by woman vaunted.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Soon shall we know—of these light-bearing torches,
And beacons and exchanges, fire with fire—
If they are true, indeed, or if, dream-fashion,
This gladsome light came and deceived our judgment.
Yon herald from the shore I see, o'ershadowed
With boughs of olive: dust, mud's thirsty brother,
Close neighbours on his garb, thus testify me
That neither voiceless, nor yet kindling for thee
Mountain-wood-flame, shall he explain by fire-smoke:
But either tell out more the joyance, speaking. . . .
Word contrary to which, I aught but love it!
For may good be—to good that 's known—appendage!

CHOROS

Whoever prays for aught else to this city
—May he himself reap fruit of his mind's error!

HERALD

Ha, my forefathers' soil of earth Argeian!
Thee, in this year's tenth light, am I returned to—
Of many broken hopes, on one hope chancing;
For never prayed I, in this earth Argeian
Dying, to share my part in tomb the dearest.
Now, hail thou earth, and hail thou also, sunlight,
And Zeus, the country's lord, and king the Puthian
From bow no longer urging at us arrows!
Enough, beside Skamandros, cam'st thou adverse:
Now, contrary, be saviour thou and healer,
O king Apollon! And gods conquest-granting,
All—I invoke too, and my tutelary
Hermes, dear herald, heralds' veneration,—

And Heroes our forthsenders,—friendly, once more
The army to receive, the war-spear's leavings!
Ha, mansions of my monarchs, roofs beloved,
And awful seats, and deities sun-fronting—
Receive with pomp your monarch, long time absent!
For he comes bringing light in night-time to you,
In common with all these—king Agamemnon.
But kindly greet him—for clear shows your duty—
Who has dug under Troia with the mattock
Of Zeus the Avenger, whereby plains are out-ploughed,
Altars unrecognizable, and gods' shrines,
And the whole land's seed thoroughly has perished.
And such a yoke-strap having cast round Troia,
The elder king Atreides, happy man—he
Comes to be honoured, worthiest of what mortals
Now are. Nor Paris nor the accomplice-city
Outvaunts their deed as more than they are done-by:
For, in a suit for rape and theft found guilty,
He missed of plunder and, in one destruction,
Fatherland, house and home has mowed to atoms:
Debts the Priamidai have paid twice over.

CHOROS

Hail, herald from the army of Achaians!

HERALD

I hail:—to die, will gainsay gods no longer!

CHOROS

Love of this fatherland did exercise thee?

HERALD

So that I weep, at least, with joy, my eyes full.

CHOROS

What, of this gracious sickness were ye gainers?

HERALD

How now? instructed, I this speech shall master.

CHOROS

For those who loved you back, with longing stricken.

HERALD

This land yearned for the yearning army, say'st thou?

CHOROS

So as to set me oft, from dark mind, groaning.

HERALD

Whence came this ill mind—hatred to the army?

CHOROS

Of old, I use, for mischief's physic, silence.

HERALD

And how, the chiefs away, did you fear any?

CHOROS

So that now,—late thy word,—much joy were—dying!

HERALD

For well have things been worked out: these,—
in much time,
Some of them, one might say, had luck in falling,
While some were faulty: since who, gods excepted,

Goes, through the whole time of his life, ungrieving?
For labours should I tell of, and bad lodgments,
Narrow deckways ill-strewn, too,—what the day's
woe
We did not groan at getting for our portion?
As for land-things, again, on went more hatred!
Since beds were ours hard by the foemen's
ramparts,
And, out of heaven and from the earth, the meadow
Dews kept a-sprinkle, an abiding damage
Of vestures, making hair a wild-beast matting.
Winter, too, if one told of it—bird-slaying—
Such as, unbearable, Idaian snow brought—
Or heat, when waveless, on its noontide couches
Without a wind, the sea would slumber falling
—Why must one mourn these? O'er and gone
is labour:
O'er and gone is it, even to those dead ones,
So that no more again they mind uprising.
Why must we tell in numbers those deprived ones,
And the live man be vexed with fate's fresh
outbreak?
Rather, I bid full farewell to misfortunes!
For us, the left from out the Argeian army,
The gain beats, nor does sorrow counterbalance.
So that 't is fitly boasted of, this sunlight,
By us, o'er sea and land the aery flyers,
"Troia at last taking, the band of Argives
Hang up such trophies to the gods of Hellas
Within their domes—new glory to grow ancient!"
Such things men having heard must praise the
city
And army-leaders: and the grace which wrought
them—
Of Zeus, shall honoured be. Thou hast my
whole word.

CHOROS

O'ercome by words, their sense I do not gainsay.
For, aye this breeds youth in the old—"to learn well."
But these things most the house and Klutaimnestra
Concern, 't is likely: while they make me rich, too.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

I shouted long ago, indeed, for joyance,
When came that first night-messenger of fire
Proclaiming Ilion's capture and dispersion.
And someone, girding me, said, "Through fire-bearers
Persuaded—Troia to be sacked now, thinkest?
Truly, the woman's way,—high to lift heart up!"
By such words I was made seem wit-bewildered:
Yet still I sacrificed; and,—female-song with,—
A shout one man and other, through the city,
Set up, congratulating in the gods' seats,
Soothing the incense-eating flame right fragrant.
And now, what 's more, indeed, why need'st thou tell me?
I of the king himself shall learn the whole word:
And,—as may best be,—I my revered husband
Shall hasten, as he comes back, to receive: for—
What 's to a wife sweeter to see than this light
(Her husband, by the god saved, back from warfare)
So as to open gates? This tell my husband—
To come at soonest to his loving city.
A faithful wife at home may he find, coming!
Such an one as he left—the dog o' the household—
Trusty to him, adverse to the ill-minded,
And, in all else, the same: no signet-impress
Having done harm to, in that time's duration.

I know nor pleasure, nor blameworthy converse
With any other man more than—bronze-dippings!

HERALD

Such boast as this—brimful of the veracious—
Is, for a high-born dame, not bad to send forth!

CHOROS

Ay, she spoke thus to thee—that hast a knowledge
From clear interpreters—a speech most seemly.
But speak thou, herald! Meneleos I ask of:
If he, returning, back in safety also
Will come with you—this land's beloved chieftain?

HERALD

There 's no way I might say things false and pleasant
For friends to reap the fruits of through a long time.

CHOROS

How then if, speaking good, things true thou chance on?

HERALD

For not well-hidden things become they, sundered.
The man has vanished from the Achaic army,
He and his ship too. I announce no falsehood.

CHOROS

Whether forth-putting openly from Ilion,
Or did storm—wide woe—snatch him from the army?

HERALD

Like topping bowman, thou hast touched the target,
And a long sorrow hast succinctly spoken.

CHOROS

Whether, then, of him, as a live or dead man
Was the report by other sailors bruited?

HERALD

Nobody knows so as to tell out clearly
Excepting Helios who sustains earth's nature.

CHOROS

How say'st thou then, did storm the naval army
Attack and end, by the celestials' anger?

HERALD

It suits not to defile a day auspicious
With ill-announcing speech: distinct each god's due:
And when a messenger with gloomy visage
To a city bears a fall'n host's woes—God ward off!—
One popular wound that happens to the city,
And many sacrificed from many households—
Men, scourged by that two-thonged whip Ares loves so,
Double spear-headed curse, bloody yoke-couple,—
Of woes like these, doubtless, whoe'er comes weighted,
Him does it suit to sing the Erinues' paian.
But who, of matters saved a glad-news-bringer,
Comes to a city in good estate rejoicing. . . .
How shall I mix good things with evil, telling
Of storm against the Achaioi, urged by gods' wrath?
For they swore league, being arch-foes before that,
Fire and the sea: and plighted troth approved they,

Destroying the unhappy Argeian armv.
At night began the bad-wave-outbreak evils ;
For, ships against each other Threkian breezes
Shattered : and these, butted at in a fury
By storm and typhoon, with surge rain-resound-
ing,—
Off they went, vanished, thro' a bad herd's
whirling.
And, when returned the brilliant light of Helios,
We view the Aigaian sea on flower with corpses
Of men Achaian and with naval ravage.
But us indeed, and ship, unhurt i' the hull too,
Either someone outstole us or outprayed us—
Some god—no man it was the tiller touching.
And Fortune, saviour, willing on our ship sat.
So as it neither had in harbour wave-surge
Nor ran aground against a shore all rocky.
And then, the water-Haides having fled from
In the white day, not trusting to our fortune,
We chewed the cud in thoughts—this novel sorrow
O' the army labouring and badly pounded.
And now—if anyone of them is breathing—
They talk of us as having perished : why not ?
And we—that they the same fate have, imagine.
May it be for the best ! Meneleos, then,
Foremost and specially to come, expect thou !
If (that is) any ray o' the sun reports him
Living and seeing too—by Zeus' contrivings,
Not yet disposed to quite destroy the lineage—
Some hope is he shall come again to household.
Having heard such things, know, thou truth art
hearing !

CHOROS

Who may he have been that named thus wholly
with exactitude—

(Was he someone whom we see not, by forecast-
ings of the future
Guiding tongue in happy mood?)
—Her with battle for a bridegroom, on all sides
contention-wooed,
Helena? Since—mark the suture!—
Ship's-Hell, Man's-Hell, City's-Hell,
From the delicately-pompous curtains that pavilion
well,
Forth, by favour of the gale
Of earth-born Zephuros did she sail.
Many shield-bearers, leaders of the pack,
Sailed too upon their track,
Theirs who had directed oar,
Then visible no more,
To Simois' leaf-luxuriant shore—
For sake of strife all gore!

To Ilion Wrath, fulfilling her intent,
This marriage-care—the rightly named so—sent:
In after-time, for the tables' abuse
And that of the hearth-partaker Zeus,
Bringing to punishment
Those who honoured with noisy throat
The honour of the bride, the hymenæal note
Which did the kinsfolk then to singing urge.
But, learning a new hymn for that which was,
The ancient city of Priamos
Groans probably a great and general dirge,
Denominating Paris
"The man that miserably marries:"—
She who, all the while before,
A life, that was a general dirge
For citizens' unhappy slaughter, bore.

And thus a man, by no milk's help,

Within his household reared a lion's whelp
That loved the teat
In life's first festal stage :
Gentle as yet,
A true child-lover, and, to men of age,
A thing whereat pride warms ;
And oft he had it in his arms
Like any new-born babe, bright-faced, to hand
Wagging its tail, at belly's strict command.

But in due time upgrown,
The custom of progenitors was shown :
For—thanks for sustenance repaying
With ravage of sheep slaughtered—
It made unbidden feast ;
With blood the house was watered,
To household came a woe there was no staying :
Great mischief many-slaying !
From God it was—some priest
Of Até, in the house, by nurture thus increased.
At first, then, to the city of Ilion went
A soul, as I might say, of windless calm—
Wealth's quiet ornament,
An eyes'-dart bearing balm,
Love's spirit-biting flower.
But—from the true course bending—
She brought about, of marriage, bitter ending :
Ill-resident, ill-mate, in power
Passing to the Priamidai—by sending
Of Hospitable Zeus—
Erinus for a bride,—to make brides mourn, her dower.

Spoken long ago
Was the ancient saying
Still among mortals staying :

"Man's great prosperity at height of rise
Engenders offspring nor unchilded dies;
And, from good fortune, to such families,
Buds forth insatiate woe."
Whereas, distinct from any,
Of my own mind I am:
For 't is the unholy deed begets the many,
Resembling each its dam.
Of households that correctly estimate,
Ever a beauteous child is born of Fate.
But ancient Arrogance delights to generate
Arrogance, young and strong mid mortals' sorrow,
Or now, or then, when comes the appointed morrow.
And she bears young Satiety;
And, fiend with whom nor fight nor war can be,
Unholy Daring—twin black Curses
Within the household, children like their nurses.

But Justice shines in smoke-grimed habitations,
And honours the well-omened life;
While,—gold-besprinkled stations
Where the hands' filth is rife,
With backward-turning eyes
Leaving,—to holy seats she hies,
Not worshipping the power of wealth
Stamped with applause by stealth:
And to its end directs each thing begun.

Approach then, my monarch, of Troia the sacker,
of Atreus the son!
How ought I address thee, how ought I revere thee,—nor yet overhitting
Nor yet underbending the grace that is fitting?
Many of mortals hasten to honour the seeming-to-be—

Passing by justice: and, with the ill-faring, to
groan as he groans all are free.
But no bite of the sorrow their liver has reached to:
They say with the joyful,—one outside on each, too,
As they force to a smile smileless faces.
But whoever is good at distinguishing races
In sheep of his flock—it is not for the eyes
Of a man to escape such a shepherd's surprise,
As they seem, from a well-wishing mind,
In watery friendship to fawn and be kind.
Thou to me, then, indeed, sending an army for
Helena's sake,
(I will not conceal it) wast—oh, by no help of the
Muses!—depicted
Not well of thy midriff the rudder directing,—con-
victed
Of bringing a boldness they did not desire to the
men with existence at stake.
But now—from no outside of mind, nor unlov-
ingly—gracious thou art
To those who have ended the labour, fulfilling
their part;
And in time shalt thou know, by inquiry instructed,
Who of citizens justly, and who not to purpose,
the city conducted.

AGAMEMNON

First, indeed, Argos, and the gods, the local,
'T is right addressing—those with me the partners
In this return and right things done the city
Of Priamos: gods who, from no tongue hearing
The rights o' the cause, for Ilion's fate man-
slaught'rous
Into the bloody vase, not oscillating,
Put the vote-pebbles, while, o' the rival vessel,
Hope rose up to the lip-edge: filled it was not.

By smoke the captured city is still conspicuous :
Até's burnt offerings live : and, dying with them,
The ash sends forth the fulsome blasts of riches.
Of these things, to the gods grace many-mindful
'T is right I render, since both nets outrageous
We built them round with, and, for sake of woman,
It did the city to dust—the Argeian monster,
The horse's nestling, the shield-bearing people
That made a leap, at setting of the Pleiads,
And, vaulting o'er the tower, the raw-flesh-feeding
Lion licked up his fill of blood tyrannic.
I to the gods indeed prolonged this preface ;
But—as for *thy* thought, I remember hearing—
I say the same, and thou co-pleader hast me.
Since few of men this faculty is born with—
To honour, without grudge, their friend, successful.
For moody, on the heart, a poison seated
Its burthen doubles to who gained the sickness :
By his own griefs he is himself made heavy,
And out-of-door prosperity seeing groans at.
Knowing, I 'd call (for well have I experienced)
" Fellowship's mirror," " phantom of a shadow,"
Those seeming to be mighty gracious to me :
While just Odusseus—he who sailed not willing—
When joined on, was to me the ready trace-horse.
This of him, whether dead or whether living,
I say. For other city-and-gods' concernment—
Appointing common courts, in full assemblage
We will consult. And as for what holds seemly—
How it may lasting stay well, must be counselled :
While what has need of medicines Paionian
We, either burning or else cutting kindly,
Will make endeavour to turn pain from sickness.
And now into the domes and homes by altar
Going, I to the gods first raise the right-hand—

They who, far sending, back again have brought me.
And Victory, since she followed, fixed remain she!

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Men, citizens, Argeians here, my worships!
I shall not shame me, consort-loving manners
To tell before you: for in time there dies off
The diffidence from people. Not from others
Learning, I of myself will tell the hard life
I bore so long as this man was 'neath Ilion.
First: for a woman, from the male divided,
To sit at home alone, is monstrous evil—
Hearing the many rumours back-revenging:
And for now This to come, now That bring after
Woe, and still worse woe, bawling in the household!
And truly, if so many wounds had chanced on
My husband here, as homeward used to dribble
Report, he 's pierced more than a net to speak of!
While, were he dying (as the words abounded)
A triple-bodied Geruon the Second,
Plenty above—for loads below I count not—
Of earth a three-share cloak he 'd boast of taking,
Once only dying in each several figure!
Because of suchlike rumours back-revenging,
Many the halters from my neck, above head,
Others than *I* loosed—loosed from neck by main force!
From this cause, sure, the boy stands not beside me—
Possessor of our troth-plights, thine and mine too—
As ought Orestes: be not thou astonished!
For, him brings up our well-disposed guest-captive
Strophios the Phokian—ills that told on both sides
To me predicting—both of thee 'neath Ilion
The danger, and if anarchy's mob-uproar
Should overthrow thy council; since 't is born with
Mortals,—whoe'er has fallen, the more to kick him.

Such an excuse, I think, no cunning carries !
As for myself—why, of my wails the rushing
Fountains are dried up : not in them a drop more !
And in my late-to-bed eyes I have damage,
Bewailing what concerned thee, those torch-holdings
For ever unattended to. In dreams—why,
Beneath the light wing-beats o' the gnat, I woke up
As he went buzzing—sorrows that concerned thee
Seeing, that filled more than their fellow-sleep-time.
Now, all this having suffered, from soul grief-free
I would style this man here the dog o' the stables,
The saviour forestay of the ship, the high roof's
Ground-prop, son sole-begotten to his father,
—Ay, land appearing to the sailors past hope,
Loveliest day to see after a tempest,
To the wayfaring-one athirst a well-spring,
—The joy, in short, of 'scaping all that 's—fatal !
I judge him worth addresses such as these are
—Envy stand off !—for many those old evils
We underwent. And now, to me—dearheadship !—
Dismount thou from this car, not earthward setting
The foot of thine, O king, that 's Ilion's spoiler !
Slave-maids, why tarry ?—whose the task allotted
To strew the soil o' the road with carpet-spreadings.
Immediately be purple-strewn the pathway,
So that to home unhoped may lead him—Justice !
As for the rest, care shall—by no sleep conquered—
Dispose things—justly (gods to aid !) appointed.

AGAMEMNON

Offspring of Leda, of my household warder,
Suitably to my absence hast thou spoken,
For long the speech thou didst outstretch ! But aptly
To praise—from others ought to go this favour.
And for the rest,—not me, in woman's fashion,

Mollify, nor—as mode of barbarous man is—
To me gape forth a groundward-falling clamour !
Nor, strewing it with garments, make my passage
Envied ! Gods, sure, with these behoves we honour:
But, for a mortal on these varied beauties
To walk—to me, indeed, is nowise fear-free.
I say—as man, not god, to me do homage !
Apart from foot-mats both and varied vestures,
Renown is loud, and—not to lose one's senses,
God's greatest gift. Behoves we him call happy
Who has brought life to end in loved well-being.
If all things I might manage thus—brave man, I !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Come now, this say, nor feign a feeling to me !

AGAMEMNON

With feeling, know indeed, I do not tamper !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Vowed'st thou to the gods, in fear, to act thus ?

AGAMEMNON

If any, *I* well knew resolve I outspoke.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

What think'st thou Priamos had done, thus victor ?

AGAMEMNON

On varied vests—I do think—he had passaged.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Then, do not, struck with awe at human censure. . . .

AGAMEMNON

Well, popular mob-outcry much avails too.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Ay, but the unenvied is not the much valued.

AGAMEMNON

Sure, 't is no woman's part to long for battle.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Why, to the prosperous, even suits a beating.

AGAMEMNON

What? thou this beating us in war dost prize too?

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Persuade thee! power, for once, grant *me*—and willing!

AGAMEMNON

But if this seem so to thee—shoes, let someone
Loose under, quick—foot's serviceable carriage!
And me, on these sea-products walking, may no
Grudge from a distance, from the god's eye, strike at!
For great shame were my strewment-spoiling—riches
Spoiling with feet, and silver-purchased textures!
Of these things, thus then. But this female-stranger
Tenderly take inside! Who conquers mildly
God, from afar, benignantly regardeth.
For, willing, no one wears a yoke that 's servile:
And she, of many valuables, outpicked
The flower, the army's gift, myself has followed.
So,—since to hear thee, I am brought about thus,—
I go into the palace—purples treading.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

There is the sea—and what man shall exhaust it?—
Feeding much purple's worth-its-weight-in-silver
Dye, ever fresh and fresh, our garments' tincture;
At home, such wealth, king, we begin—by gods'
help—
With having, and to lack, the household knows not.
Of many garments had I vowed a treading
(In oracles if fore-enjoined the household)
Of this dear soul the safe-return-price scheming!
For, root existing, foliage goes up houses,
O'erspreading shadow against Seirios dog-star;
And, thou returning to the hearth domestic,
Warmth, yea, in winter dost thou show returning.
And when, too, Zeus works, from the green-grape
acrid,
Wine—then, already, cool in houses cometh—
The perfect man his home perambulating!
Zeus, Zeus Perfecter, these my prayers perfect thou!
Thy care be—yea—of things thou mayst make
perfect!

CHOROS

Wherefore to me, this fear—
Groundedly stationed here
Fronting my heart, the portent-watcher—flits she?
Wherefore should prophet-play
The uncalled and unpaid lay,
Nor—having spat forth fear, like bad dreams—
sits she
On the mind's throne beloved—well-suasive
Boldness?
For time, since, by a throw of all the hands,
The boat's stern-cables touched the sands,
Has past from youth to oldness,—
When under Ilion rushed the ship-borne bands.

And from my eyes I learn—
Being myself my witness—their return.
Yet, all the same, without a lyre, my soul,
Itself its teacher too, chants from within
Erinus' dirge, not having now the whole
Of Hope's dear boldness: nor my inwards sin—
The heart that 's rolled in whirls against the mind
Justly presageful of a fate behind.
But I pray—things false, from my hope, may fall
Into the fate that 's not-fulfilled-at-all!

Especially at least, of health that 's great
The term 's insatiable: for, its weight
—A neighbour, with a common wall between—
Ever will sickness lean;
And destiny, her course pursuing straight,
Has struck man's ship against a reef unseen.
Now, when a portion, rather than the treasure,
Fear casts from sling, with peril in right measure,
It has not sunk—the universal freight,
(With misery freighted over-full)
Nor has fear whelmed the hull.
Then too the gift of Zeus,
Two-handedly profuse,
Even from the furrows' yield for yearly use
Has done away with famine, the disease;
But blood of man to earth once falling—deadly, black—
In times ere these,—
Who may, by singing spells, call back?
Zeus had not else stopped one who rightly knew
The way to bring the dead again.
But, did not an appointed Fate constrain
The Fate from gods, to bear no more than due,
My heart, outstripping what tongue utters,

Would have all out: which now, in darkness, mutters
Moodily grieved, nor ever hopes to find
How she a word in season may unwind
From out the enkindling mind.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Take thyself in, thou too—I say, Kassandra!
Since Zeus—not angrily—in household placed thee
Partaker of hand-sprinklings, with the many
Slaves stationed, his the Owner's altar close to.
Descend from out this car, nor be high-minded!
And truly they do say Alkmené's child once
Bore being sold, slaves' barley-bread his living.
If, then, necessity of this lot o'erbalance,
Much is the favour of old-wealthy masters:
For those who, never hoping, made fine harvest
Are harsh to slaves in all things, beyond measure.
Thou hast—with us—such usage as law warrants.

CHOROS

To thee it was, she paused plain speech from speaking.
Being inside the fatal nets—obeying,
Thou mayst obey: but thou mayst disobey too!

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Why, if she is not, in the swallow's fashion,
Possessed of voice that 's unknown and barbaric,
I, with speech—speaking in mind's scope—persuade her.

CHOROS

Follow! The best—as things now stand—she speaks of.
Obey thou, leaving this thy car-enthronement!

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Well, with this thing at door, for me no leisure
To waste time: as concerns the hearth mid-navelled,
Already stand the sheep for fireside slaying
By those who never hoped to have such favour.
If thou, then, aught of this wilt do, delay not!
But if thou, being witless, tak'st no word in,
Speak thou, instead of voice, with hand as Kars do!

CHOROS

She seems a plain interpreter in need of,
The stranger! and her way—a beast's new-captured!

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Why, she is mad, sure,—hears her own bad senses,—
Who, while she comes, leaving a town new-captured,
Yet knows not how to bear the bit o' the bridle
Before she has out-frothed her bloody fierceness.
Not I—throwing away more words—will shamed be!

CHOROS

But I,—for I compassionate,—will chafe not.
Come, O unhappy one, this car vacating,
Yielding to this necessity, prove yoke's use!

KASSANDRA

Ototototoi, Gods, Earth,—
Apollon, Apollon!

CHOROS

Why didst thou "ototoi" concerning Loxias?
Since he is none such as to suit a mourner.

KASSANDRA

Ototoi, Gods, Earth,—
Apollon, Apollon!

CHOROS

Ill-boding here again the god invokes she
—Nowise empowered in woes to stand by helpful.

KASSANDRA

Apollon, Apollon,
Guard of the ways, my destroyer!
For thou hast quite, this second time, destroyed me.

CHOROS

To prophesy she seems of her own evils:
Remains the god-gift to the slave-soul present.

KASSANDRA

Apollon, Apollon,
Guard of the ways, my destroyer!
Ha, whither hast thou led me? to what roof now?

CHOROS

To the Atreidai's roof: if this thou know'st not,
I tell it thee, nor this wilt thou call falsehood.

KASSANDRA

How! How!
God-hated, then! Of many a crime it knew—
Self-slaying evils, halters too:
Man's-shambles, blood-besprinkler of the ground!

CHOROS

She seems to be good-nosed, the stranger: dog-like,
She snuffs indeed the victims she will find there.

KASSANDRA

How! How!
By the witnesses here I am certain now!
These children bewailing their slaughters—flesh
dressed in the fire
And devoured by their sire!

CHOROS

Ay, we have heard of thy soothsaying glory,
Doubtless: but prophets none are we in scent of!

KASSANDRA

Ah, gods, what ever does she meditate?
What this new anguish great?
Great in the house here she meditates ill
Such as friends cannot bear, cannot cure it: and
still
Off stands all Resistance
Afar in the distance!

CHOROS

Of these I witless am—these prophesyings.
But those I knew: for the whole city bruits them.

KASSANDRA

Ah, unhappy one, this thou consummatest?
Thy husband, thy bed's common guest,
In the bath having brightened . . . How shall I
declare
Consummation? It soon will be there:
For hand after hand she outstretches,
At life as she reaches!

CHOROS

Nor yet I 've gone with thee! for—after riddles—
Now, in blind oracles, I feel resourceless.

KASSANDRA

Eh, eh, papai, papai,
What this, I espy?
Some net of Haides undoubtedly!
Nay, rather, the snare
Is she who has share
In his bed, who takes part in the murder there!
But may a revolt—
Unceasing assault—
On the Race, raise a shout
Sacrificial, about
A victim—by stoning—
For murder atoning!

CHOROS

What this Erinus which i' the house thou callest
To raise her cry? Not me thy word enlightens!
To my heart has run
A drop of the crocus-dye:
Which makes for those
On earth by the spear that lie,
A common close
With life's descending sun.
Swift is the curse begun!

KASSANDRA

How! How!
See—see quick!
Keep the bull from the cow!
In the vesture she catching him, strikes him now
With the black-horned trick,
And he falls in the watery vase!
Of the craft-killing cauldron I tell thee the case!

CHOROS

I would not boast to be a topping critic
Of oracles: but to some sort of evil
I liken these. From oracles, what good speech
To mortals, beside, is sent?
It comes of their evils: these arts word-abounding
that sing the event
Bring the fear 't is their office to teach.

KASSANDRA

Ah me, ah me—
Of me unhappy, evil-destined fortunes!
For I bewail my proper woe
As, mine with his, all into one I throw.
Why hast thou hither me unhappy brought?
—Unless that I should die with him—for nought!
What else was sought?

CHOROS

Thou art some mind-mazed creature, god-possessed:
And all about thyself dost wail
A lay—no lay!
Like some brown nightingale
Insatiable of noise, who—well-away!—
From her unhappy breast
Keeps moaning Itus, Itus, and his life
With evils, flourishing on each side, rife.

KASSANDRA

Ah me, ah me,
The fate o' the nightingale, the clear resounder!
For a body wing-borne have the gods cast round her,
And sweet existence, from misfortunes free:

But for myself remains a sundering
With spear, the two-edged thing!

CHOROS

Whence hast thou this on-rushing god-involving pain
And spasms in vain?
For, things that terrify,
With changing unintelligible cry
Thou strikest up in tune, yet all the while
After that Orthian style!
Whence hast thou limits to the oracular road,
That evils bode?

KASSANDRA

Ah me, the nuptials, the nuptials of Paris, the deadly to friends!
Ah me, of Skamandros the draught
Paternal! There once, to these ends,
On thy banks was I brought,
The unhappy! And now, by Kokutos and Acheron's shore
I shall soon be, it seems, these my oracles singing once more!

CHOROS

Why this word, plain too much,
Hast thou uttered? A babe might learn of such!
I am struck with a bloody bite—here under—
At the fate woe-wreaking
Of thee shrill shrieking:
To me who hear—a wonder!

KASSANDRA

Ah me, the toils—the toils of the city
The wholly destroyed: ah, pity,

Of the sacrificings my father made
In the ramparts' aid—
Much slaughter of grass-fed flocks—that afforded
no cure
That the city should not, as it does now, the
burthen endure!
But I, with the soul on fire,
Soon to the earth shall cast me and expire.

CHORUS

To things, on the former consequent,
Again hast thou given vent:
And 't is some evil-meaning fiend doth move
thee,
Heavily falling from above thee,
To melodize thy sorrows—else, in singing,
Calamitous, death-bringing!
And of all this the end
I am without resource to apprehend.

KASSANDRA

Well then, the oracle from veils no longer
Shall be outlooking, like a bride new-married:
But bright it seems, against the sun's uprisings
Breathing, to penetrate thee: so as, wave-like,
To wash against the rays a woe much greater
Than this. I will no longer teach by riddles.
And witness, running with me, that of evils
Done long ago, I nosing track the footstep!
For, this same roof here—never quits a Choros
One-voiced, not well-tuned since no "well" it
utters:
And truly having drunk, to get more courage,
Man's blood—the Komos keeps within the house-
hold
—Hard to be sent outside—of sister Furies:

They hymn their hymn—within the house close sitting—
The first beginning curse : in turn spit forth at
The Brother's bed, to him who spurned it hostile.
Have I missed aught, or hit I like a bowman ?
False prophet am I,—knock at doors, a babbler ?
Henceforward witness, swearing now, I know not
By other's word the old sins of this household !

CHOROS

And how should oath, bond honourably binding,
Become thy cure ? No less I wonder at thee
—That thou, beyond sea reared, a strange-tongued city
Shouldst hit in speaking, just as if thou stood'st by !

KASSANDRA

Prophet Apollon put me in this office.

CHOROS

What, even though a god, with longing smitten ?

KASSANDRA

At first, indeed, shame was to me to say this.

CHOROS

For, more relaxed grows everyone who fares well.

KASSANDRA

But he was athlete to me—huge grace breathing !

CHOROS

Well, to the work of children, went ye law's way ?

KASSANDRA

Having consented, I played false to Loxias.

CHOROS

Already when the wits inspired possessed of?

KASSANDRA

Already townsmen all their woes I foretold.

CHOROS

How wast thou then unhurt by Loxias' anger?

KASSANDRA

I no one aught persuaded, when I sinned thus.

CHOROS

To us, at least, now sooth to say thou seemest.

KASSANDRA

Halloo, halloo, ah, evils!
Again, straightforward foresight's fearful labour
Whirls me, distracting with prelusive last-lays!
Behold ye those there, in the household seated,—
Youngones,—ofdreamsapproachingtothefigures?
Children, as if they died by their beloveds—
Hands they have filled with flesh, the meal domestic—
Entrails and vitals both, most piteous burthen,
Plain they are holding!—which their father tasted!
For this, I say, plans punishment a certain
Lion ignoble, on the bed that wallows,
House-guard (ah, me!) to the returning master
—Mine, since to bear the slavish yoke behoves me!
The ship's commander, Ilion's desolator,
Knows not what things the tongue of the lewd she-dog
Speaking, outspreading, shiny-souled, in fashion
Of Até hid, will reach to, by ill fortune!

Such things she dares—the female, the male's slayer!
She is . . . how calling her the hateful bite-beast
May I hit the mark? Some amphisbaina,—Skulla
Housing in rocks, of mariners the mischief,
Revelling Haides' mother,—curse, no truce with,
Breathing at friends! How piously she shouted,
The all-courageous, as at turn of battle!
She seems to joy at the back-bringing safety!
Of this, too, if I nought persuade, all 's one!
Why?
What is to be will come. And soon thou, present,
"True prophet all too much" wilt pitying style me.

CHOROS

Thuestes' feast, indeed, on flesh of children,
I went with, and I shuddered. Fear too holds me
Listing what 's true as life, nowise out-imaged.

KASSANDRA

I say, thou Agamemnon's fate shalt look on.

CHOROS

Speak good words, O unhappy! Set mouth sleeping!

KASSANDRA

But Paian stands in no stead to the speech here.

CHOROS

Nay, if the thing be near: but never be it!

KASSANDRA

Thou, indeed, prayest: they to kill are busy.

CHOROS

Of what man is it ministered, this sorrow?

KASSANDRA

There again, wide thou look'st of my foretellings.

CHOROS

For, the fulfiller's scheme I have not gone with.

KASSANDRA

And yet too well I know the speech Hellenic.

CHOROS

For Puthian oracles, thy speech, and hard too.

KASSANDRA

Papai: what fire this! and it comes upon me! 128▸
Ototoi, Lukeion Apollon, ah me—me!
She, the two-footed lioness that sleeps with
The wolf, in absence of the generous lion,
Kills me the unhappy one: and as a poison
Brewing, to put my price too in the anger, 1285
She vows, against her mate this weapon whetting
To pay him back the bringing me, with slaughter.
Why keep I then these things to make me laughed
at,
Both wands and, round my neck, oracular fillets?
Thee, at least, ere my own fate will I ruin: 1290
Go, to perdition falling! Boons exchange we—
Some other Até in my stead make wealthy!
See there—himself, Apollon stripping from me
The oracular garment! having looked upon me
—Even in these adornments, laughed by friends at, 1295
As good as foes, i' the balance weighed: and
vainly—
For, called crazed stroller,—as I had been gipsy,
Beggar, unhappy, starved to death,—I bore it.
And now the Prophet—prophet me undoing,

Has led away to these so deadly fortunes!
Instead of my sire's altar, waits the hack-block
She struck with first warm bloody sacrificing!
Yet nowise unavenged of gods will death be:
For there shall come another, our avenger,
The mother-slaying scion, father's doomsman:
Fugitive, wanderer, from this land an exile,
Back shall he come,—for friends, copestone these curses!
For there is sworn a great oath from the gods that
Him shall bring hither his fallen sire's prostration.
Why make I then, like an indweller, moaning?
Since at the first I foresaw Ilion's city
Suffering as it has suffered: and who took it,
Thus by the judgment of the gods are faring.
I go, will suffer, will submit to dying!
But, Haides' gates—these same I call, I speak to,
And pray that on an opportune blow chancing,
Without a struggle,—blood the calm death bringing
In easy outflow,—I this eye may close up!

CHOROS

O much unhappy, but, again, much learned
Woman, long hast thou outstretched! But if truly
Thou knowest thine own fate, how comes that, like to
A god-led steer, to altar bold thou treadest?

KASSANDRA

There 's no avoidance,—strangers, no! Some time more!

CHOROS

He last is, anyhow, by time advantaged.

KASSANDRA

It comes, the day: I shall by flight gain little.

CHOROS

But know thou patient art from thy brave spirit!

KASSANDRA

Such things hears no one of the happy-fortuned.

CHOROS

But gloriously to die—for man is grace, sure.

KASSANDRA

Ah, sire, for thee and for thy noble children!

CHOROS

But what thing is it? What fear turns thee backwards?

KASSANDRA

Alas, alas!

CHOROS

Why this "Alas!" if 't is no spirit's loathing?

KASSANDRA

Slaughter blood-dripping does the household smell of!

CHOROS

How else? This scent is of hearth-sacrifices.

KASSANDRA

Such kind of steam as from a tomb is proper!

CHOROS

No Surian honour to the House thou speak'st of!

KASSANDRA

But I will go,—even in the household wailing
My fate and Agamemnon's. Life suffice me!

Ah, strangers!
I cry not "ah"—as bird at bush—through terror
Idly! to me, the dead, this much bear witness:
When, for me—woman, there shall die a woman,
And, for a man ill-wived, a man shall perish!
This hospitality I ask as dying.

CHOROS

O sufferer, thee—thy foretold fate I pity.

KASSANDRA

Yet once for all, to speak a speech, I fain am:
No dirge, mine for myself! The sun I pray to,
Fronting his last light!—to my own avengers—
That from my hateful slayers they exact too
Pay for the dead slave—easy-managed hand's work!

CHOROS

Alas for mortal matters! Happy-fortuned,—
Why, any shade would turn them: if unhappy,
By throws the wetting sponge has spoiled the picture!
And more by much in mortals this I pity.
The being well-to-do—
Insatiate a desire of this
Born with all mortals is,
Nor any is there who
Well-being forces off, aroints
From roofs whereat a finger points,
"No more come in!" exclaiming. This man, too,
To take the city of Priamos did the celestials give,
And, honoured by the god, he homeward comes;
But now if, of the former, he shall pay
The blood back, and, for those who ceased to live,
Dying, for deaths in turn new punishment he dooms—

Who, being mortal, would not pray
With an unmischievous
Daimon to have been born—who would not,
hearing thus?

AGAMEMNON

Ah me! I am struck—a right-aimed stroke within
me!

CHOROS

Silence! Who is it shouts "stroke"—"right-
aimedly" a wounded one?

AGAMEMNON

Ah me! indeed again,—a second, struck by!

CHOROS

This work seems to me completed by this "Ah
me" of the king's;
But we somehow may together share in solid
counsellings.

CHOROS 1

I, in the first place, my opinion tell you:
—To cite the townsmen, by help-cry, to house here.

CHOROS 2

To me, it seems we ought to fall upon them
Atquickest—prove the fact by sword fresh-flowing!

CHOROS 3

And I, of such opinion the partaker,
Vote—to do something: not to wait—the main
point!

CHOROS 4

'T is plain to see: for they prelude as though of
A tyranny the signs they gave the city.

CHOROS 5

For we waste time; while they,—this waiting's glory
Treading to ground,—allow the hand no slumber.

CHOROS 6

I know not—chancing on some plan—to tell it :
'T is for the doer to plan of the deed also.

CHOROS 7

And I am such another : since I 'm schemeless
How to raise up again by words—a dead man !

CHOROS 8

What, and, protracting life, shall we give way thus
To the disgracers of our home, these rulers ?

CHOROS 9

Why, 't is unbearable : but to die is better :
For death than tyranny is the riper finish !

CHOROS 10

What, by the testifying "Ah me" of him,
Shall we prognosticate the man as perished ?

CHOROS 11

We must quite know ere speak these things concerning :
For to conjecture and "quite know" are two things.

CHOROS 12

This same to praise I from all sides abound in—
Clearly to know—Atreides, what he 's doing !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Much having been before to purpose spoken,
The opposite to say I shall not shamed be :

For how should one, to enemies,—in semblance,
Friends,—enmity proposing,—sorrow's net-frame
Enclose, a height superior to outleaping?
To me, indeed, this struggle of old—not mindless
Of an old victory—came: with time, I grant you!
I stand where I have struck, things once accomplished:
And so have done,—and this deny I shall not,—
As that his fate was nor to fly nor ward off.
A wrap-round with no outlet, as for fishes,
I fence about him—the rich woe of the garment:
I strike him twice, and in a double "Ah-me!"
He let his limbs go—*there!* And to him, fallen,
The third blow add I, giving—of Below-ground
Zeus, guardian of the dead—the votive favour.
Thus in the mind of him he rages, falling,
And blowing forth a brisk blood-spatter, strikes me
With the dark drop of slaughterous dew—rejoicing
No less than, at the god-given dewy-comfort,
The sown-stuff in its birth-throes from the calyx.
Since so these things are,—Argives, my revered here,—
Ye may rejoice—if ye rejoice: but I—boast!
If it were fit on corpse to pour libation,
That would be right—right over and above, too!
The cup of evils in the house he, having
Filled with such curses, himself coming drinks of.

CHOROS

We wonder at thy tongue: since bold-mouthed truly
Is she who in such speech boasts o'er her husband!

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Ye test me as I were a witless woman:
But I—with heart intrepid—to you knowers

Say (and thou—if thou wilt or praise or blame me,
Comes to the same)—this man is Agamemnon,
My husband, dead, the work of the right hand here,
Ay, of a just artificer : so things are.

CHORUS

What evil, O woman, food or drink, earth-bred
Or sent from the flowing sea,
Of such having fed
Didst thou set on thee
This sacrifice
And popular cries
Of a curse on thy head ?
Off thou hast thrown him, off hast cut
The man from the city : but—
Off from the city thyself shalt be
Cut—to the citizens
A hate immense !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Now, indeed, thou adjudgest exile to me,
And citizens' hate, and to have popular curses :
Nothing of this against the man here bringing,
Who, no more awe-checked than as 't were a beast's fate,—
With sheep abundant in the well-fleeced graze-flocks,—
Sacrificed *his* child,—dearest fruit of travail
To me,—as song-spell against Threkian blowings.
Not *him* did it behove thee hence to banish
—Pollution's penalty ? But hearing *my* deeds
Justicer rough thou art ! Now, this I tell thee :
To threaten thus—me, one prepared to have thee
(On like conditions, thy hand conquering) o'er me

Rule : but if God the opposite ordain us,
Thou shalt learn—late taught, certes—to be modest.

CHOROS

Greatly-intending thou art :
Much-mindful, too, hast thou cried
(Since thy mind, with its slaughter-outpouring part,
Is frantic) that over the eyes, a patch
Of blood—with blood to match—
Is plain for a pride !
Yet still, bereft of friends, thy fate
Is—blow with blow to expiate !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

And this thou hearest—of my oaths, just warrant !
By who fulfilled things for my daughter, Justice,
Até, Erinus,—by whose help I slew him,—
Not mine the fancy—Fear will tread my palace
So long as on my hearth there burns a fire,
Aigisthos as before well-caring for me ;
Since he to me is shield, no small, of boldness.
Here does he lie—outrager of this female,
Dainty of all the Chruseids under Ilion ;
And she—the captive, the soothsayer also
And couchmate of this man, oracle-speaker,
Faithful bed-fellow,—ay, the sailors' benches
They wore in common, nor unpunished did so,
Since he is—thus ! While, as for her,—swan-fashion,
Her latest having chanted,—dying wailing
She lies,—to him, a sweetheart : me she brought to—
My bed's by-nicety—the whet of dalliance.

CHOROS

Alas, that some
Fate would come
Upon us in quickness—
Neither much sickness
Neither bed-keeping—
And bear unended sleeping,
Now that subdued
Is our keeper, the kindest of mood !
Having borne, for a woman's sake, much strife—
By a woman he withered from life !
Ah me !
Law-breaking Helena who, one,
Hast many, so many souls undone
'Neath Troia ! and now the consummated
Much-memorable curse
Hast thou made flower-forth, red
With the blood no rains disperse,
That which was then in the House—
Strife all-subduing, the woe of a spouse.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Nowise, of death the fate—
Burdened by these things—supplicate !
Nor on Helena turn thy wrath
As the man-destroyer, as "she who hath,
Being but one,
Many and many a soul undone
Of the men, the Danaoi "—
And wrought immense annoy !

CHOROS

Daimon, who fallest
Upon this household and the double-raced
Tantalidai, a rule, minded like theirs displaced,

Thou rulest me with, now,
Whose heart thou gallest !
And on the body, like a hateful crow,
Stationed, all out of tune, his chant to chant
Doth Something vaunt !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Now, of a truth, hast thou set upright
Thy mouth's opinion,—
Naming the Sprite,
The triply gross,
O'er the race that has dominion :
For through him it is that Eros
The carnage-licker
In the belly is bred : ere ended quite
Is the elder throe—new ichor !

CHOROS

Certainly, great of might
And heavy of wrath, the Sprite
Thou tellest of, in the palace
(Woe, woe !)
—An evil tale of a fate
By Até's malice
Rendered insatiate !
Oh, oh,—
King, king, how shall I beweep thee ?
From friendly soul whatever say ?
Thou liest where webs of the spider o'ersweep
thee
In impious death, life breathing away.
O me—me !
This couch, not free !
By a slavish death subdued thou art,
From the hand, by the two-edged dart.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Thou boastest this deed to be mine :
But leave off styling me
"The Agamemnonian wife!"
For, showing himself in sign
Of the spouse of the corpse thou dost see,
Did the ancient bitter avenging-ghost
Of Atreus, savage host,
Pay the man here as price—
A full-grown for the young one's sacrifice.

CHOROS

That no cause, indeed, of this killing art thou,
Who shall be witness-bearer?
How shall he bear it—how?
But the sire's avenging-ghost might be in the deed a sharer.
He is forced on and on
By the kin-born flowing of blood,
—Black Ares : to where, having gone,
He shall leave off, flowing done,
At the frozen-child's-flesh food.
King, king, how shall I beweep thee?
From friendly soul whatever say?
Thou liest where webs of the spider o'ersweep thee
In impious death, life breathing away.
O me—me!
This couch, not free!
By a slavish death subdued thou art,
From the hand, by the two-edged dart.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

No death "unfit for the free"
Do I think this man's to be :
For did not himself a slavish curse

To his household decree?
But the scion of him, myself did nurse—
That much-bewailed Iphigeneia, he
Having done well by,—and as well, nor worse,
Been done to,—let him not in Haides loudly
Bear himself proudly!
Being by sword-destroying death amerced
For that sword's punishment himself inflicted
first.

CHORUS

I at a loss am left—
Of a feasible scheme of mind bereft—
Where I may turn: for the house is falling:
I fear the bloody crash of the rain
That ruins the roof as it bursts amain:
The warning-drop
Has come to a stop.
Destiny doth Justice whet
For other deed of hurt, on other whetstones
yet.
Woe, earth, earth—would thou hadst taken *me*
Ere I saw the man I see,
On the pallet-bed
Of the silver-sided bath-vase, dead!
Who is it shall bury him, who
Sing his dirge? Can it be true
That *thou* wilt dare this same to do—
Having slain thy husband, thine own,
To make his funeral moan:
And for the soul of him, in place
Of his mighty deeds, a graceless grace
To wickedly institute? By whom
Shall the tale of praise o'er the tomb
At the god-like man be sent—
From the truth of his mind as he toils intent?

KLUTAIMNESTRA

It belongs not to thee to declare
This object of care !
By us did he fall—down there !
Did he die—down there ! and down, no less,
We will bury him there, and not beneath
The wails of the household over his death :
But Iphigeneia,—with kindliness,—
His daughter,—as the case requires,
Facing him full, at the rapid-flowing
Passage of Groans shall—both hands throwing
Around him—kiss that kindest of sires !

CHOROS

This blame comes in the place of blame :
Hard battle it is to judge each claim.
" He is borne away who bears away :
And the killer has all to pay."
And this remains while Zeus is remaining,
" The doer shall suffer in time "—for, such his
ordaining.
Who may cast out of the House its cursed brood ?
The race is to Até glued !

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Thou hast gone into this oracle
With a true result. For me, then,—I will
—To the Daimon of the Pleisthenidai
Making an oath—with all these things comply
Hard as they are to bear. For the rest—
Going from out this House, a guest,
May he wear some other family
To nought, with the deaths of kin by kin !
And,—keeping a little part of my goods,—
Wholly am I contented in

Having expelled from the royal House
These frenzied moods
The mutually-murderous.

AIGISTHOS

O light propitious of day justice-bringing!
I may say truly, now, that men's avengers,
The gods from high, of earth behold the sorrows—
Seeing, as I have, i' the spun robes of the Erinues,
This man here lying,—sight to me how pleasant!—
His father's hands' contrivances repaying.
For Atreus, this land's lord, of this man father,
Thuestes, my own father—to speak clearly—
His brother too,—being i' the rule contested,—
Drove forth to exile from both town and household:
And, coming back, to the hearth turned, a suppliant,
Wretched Thuestes found the fate assured him
—Not to die, bloodying his paternal threshold
Just there: but host-wise this man's impious father
Atreus, soul-keenly more than kindly,—seeming
To joyous hold a flesh-day,—to my father
Served up a meal, the flesh of his own children.
The feet indeed and the hands' top divisions
He hid, high up and isolated sitting:
But, their unshowing parts in ignorance taking,
He forthwith eats food—as thou seest—perdition
To the race: and then, 'ware of the deed ill-omened,
He shrieked O!—falls back, vomiting, from the carnage,
And fate on the Pelopidai past bearing
He prays down—putting in his curse together

The kicking down o' the feast—that so might perish
The race of Pleisthenes entire : and thence is
That it is given thee to see this man prostrate.
And I was rightly of this slaughter stitch-man :
Since me,—being third from ten,—with my poor father
He drives out—being then a babe in swathe-bands:
But, grown up, back again has justice brought me :
And of this man I got hold—being without-doors—
Fitting together the whole scheme of ill-will.
So, sweet, in fine, even to die were to me,
Seeing, as I have, this man i' the toils of justice !

CHOROS

Aigisthos, arrogance in ills I love not.
Dost thou say—willing, thou didst kill the man here,
And, alone, plot this lamentable slaughter ?
I say—thy head in justice will escape not
The people's throwing--know that !—stones and curses !

AIGISTHOS

Thou such things soundest—seated at the lower
Oarage to those who rule at the ship's mid-bench ?
Thou shalt know, being old, how heavy is teaching
To one of the like age—bidden be modest !
But chains and old age and the pangs of fasting
Stand out before all else in teaching,—prophets
At souls'-cure ! Dost not, seeing aught, see this too ?
Against goads kick not, lest tript-up thou suffer !

CHOROS

Woman, thou,—of him coming new from battle
Houseguard—thy husband's bed the while dis-
gracing,—
For the Army-leader didst thou plan this fate too?

AIGISTHOS

These words too are of groans the prime-begetters!
Truly a tongue opposed to Orpheus hast thou:
For he led all things by his voice's grace-charm,
But thou, upstirring them by these wild yelpings,
Wilt lead them! Forced, thou wilt appear the
tamer!

CHOROS

So—thou shalt be my king then of the Argeians—
Who, not when for this man his fate thou plannedst,
Daredst to do this deed—thyself the slayer!

AIGISTHOS

For, to deceive him was the wife's part, certes:
I was looked after—foe, ay, old-begotten!
But out of this man's wealth will I endeavour
To rule the citizens: and the no-man-minder
—Him will I heavily yoke—by no means trace-
horse,
A corned-up colt! but that bad friend in dark-
ness,
Famine its housemate, shall behold him gentle.

CHOROS

Why then, this man here, from a coward spirit,
Didst not thou slay thyself? But,—helped,—a
woman,
The country's pest, and that of gods o' the
country,

Killed him! Orestes, where may he see light now?
That coming hither back, with gracious fortune,
Of both these he may be the all-conquering slayer?

AIGISTHOS

But since this to do thou thinkest—and not talk
—thou soon shalt know!
Up then, comrades dear! the proper thing to do
—not distant this!

CHOROS

Up then! hilt in hold, his sword let everyone aright dispose!

AIGISTHOS

Ay, but I myself too, hilt in hold, do not refuse to die.

CHOROS

Thou wilt die, thou say'st, to who accept it. We the chance demand.

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Nowise, O belovedest of men, may we do other ills!
To have reaped away these, even, is a harvest much to me.
Go, both thou and these the old men, to the homes appointed each,
Ere ye suffer! It behoved one do these things just as we did:
And if of these troubles there should be enough—we may assent
—By the Daimon's heavy heel unfortunately stricken ones!
So a woman's counsel hath it—if one judge it learning-worth.

AIGISTHOS

But to think that these at me the idle tongue
should thus o'erbloom,
And throw out such words—the Daimon's power
experimenting on—
And, of modest knowledge missing,—me, the
ruler, . . .

CHOROS

Ne'er may this befall Argeians—wicked man to
fawn before!

AIGISTHOS

Anyhow, in after days, will I, yes, I, be at thee yet!

CHOROS

Not if hither should the Daimon make Orestes
straightway come!

AIGISTHOS

O, I know, myself, that fugitives on hopes are
pasture-fed!

CHOROS

Do thy deed, get fat, defiling justice, since the
power is thine!

AIGISTHOS

Know that thou shalt give me satisfaction for this
folly's sake!

CHOROS

Boast on, bearing thee audacious, like a cock his
females by!

AGAMEMNON

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Have not thou respect for these same idle yelp-
    ings! I and thou
Will arrange it, o'er this household ruling ex-
    cellently well.

END OF VOL. VIII

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